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ABSTRACT

This study guide was developed by the Peace Corps' Office of World Wise Schools. The aim of the guide is to promote better understanding of other people on the part of the people of the United States. Teachers can use the book to supplement the study of Central America or the environment. Using the materials, students will learn to: (1) identify similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of young people in another country; (2) apply geographic themes to the country of Honduras; and (3) research the geography and culture of a Peace Corps volunteer's hoist country. A unit for grades 3 through 5 focuses on the geographic themes of location, place, and relationships within places. The latter two themes are also the subject of units for grades 6 through 9 and 10 through 12. Each of the units includes information for teachers and worksheets. Sixty-three references and a list of people and organizations that provided information for the study guide are attached. (LBG)

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PEACE CORPS

OF THE UNITED STATES

Office of World Wise Schools

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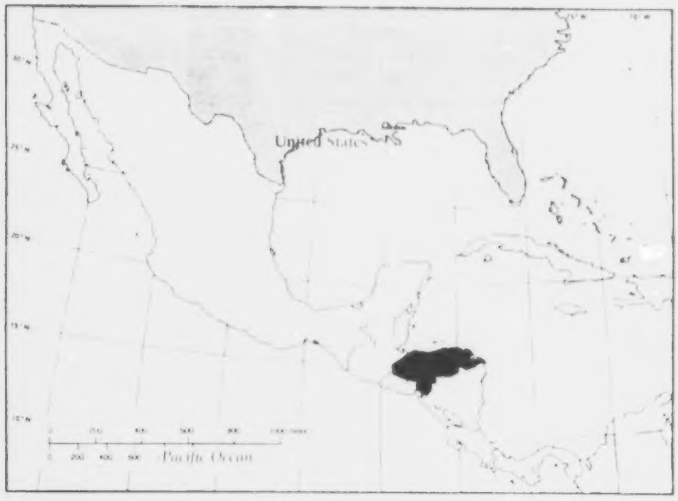

Destination: HONDURAS

STUDY GUIDE

SO 022 832

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DESTINATION: HONDURAS
STUDY GUIDE

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Dear World Wise Schools Teacher:

In the three decades of the Peace Corps' existence, our Volunteers have become legendary for their efforts to meet two broad objectives that Congress established for the federal agency. Our Volunteers have given the people of developing countries the tools to solve their own problems, and we have helped other people to understand the United States.

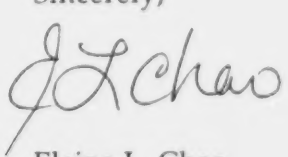
But there is another major goal for the Peace Corps. Congress has directed us to help the people of the United States to understand other societies.

In *Destination: Honduras* we draw upon the experiences of Peace Corps Volunteers to explore the culture, geography and history of an important Central American neighbor. The people of Honduras touch our lives almost every day in some surprising ways. The beef in our fast-food hamburgers, the coffee in our morning cups, the bananas on our kitchen counters, and the mahogany in our living room furniture -- all may be traced to the forests and fields of Honduras and to the labor of people who are very much like ourselves.

Something else is special about the inhabitants of Honduras. Like us, they are Americans. They lay claim to much of the history that shaped us, and their future will be affected by our joint stewardship of the same environment.

Thank you for working with the Peace Corps of the United States to promote cultural understanding and to help prepare our nation's young people for their future leadership of our multi-cultural world.

Sincerely,



Elaine L. Chao
Director
Peace Corps of the United States

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

THE PEACE CORPS OF THE UNITED STATES

The Peace Corps of the United States was created when President John F. Kennedy issued an Executive Order on March 1, 1961. Since that time, Volunteers have helped people in other countries develop their skills to fight hunger, disease, poverty and lack of opportunity. In return, Volunteers have seen themselves, their country, and the world from a new perspective.

Peace Corps, seeking to promote world peace and friendship, has three congressionally mandated goals:

1. To help the people of interested countries meet their needs for trained men and women;

2. To help promote a better understanding of the people of the United States on the part of the people served; and,

3. To promote a better understanding of other people on the part of the people of the United States.

Since the first group of Volunteers arrived in Ghana, West Africa, in 1961, over 131,000 United States citizens have served as Peace Corps Volunteers in more than 100 countries. Although programs vary from country to country based on the nation's needs and requests, Volunteers traditionally offer skills in the areas of education, agriculture, business, engineering, community development and health. Recent program additions have included environmental education, special education, and the development of programs aimed at improving the status of women and their families. Before placement at their sites, Volunteers receive training in specific technical skills, as well as in the language and culture of their host countries. Cross-cultural training, which includes the study of the history, customs, and values of the host country, prepares Volunteers to become part of a local community for the duration of their two-year service.

Today, over 6,000 Peace Corps Volunteers are working in nearly 90 countries around the globe. Although the average age of Volunteers in 1961 was twenty-two, today it is approximately thirty-one; in fact, one out of eight current Volunteers is over the age of fifty! By living and working within their local communities, Peace Corps Volunteers not only learn about the people of their host country, they also offer people around the world a chance to learn first hand about the people of the United States.

Volunteers also care about carrying out the third goal of Peace Corps: teaching citizens of the United States about the people and culture of their host countries. World Wise Schools is a third goal program which matches current Volunteers with grade three through twelve classes throughout the United States in an information exchange. Begun in 1989, the program promotes geographical and cross-cultural awareness while developing the spirit of volunteerism. Today almost 3000 classes from all fifty states are enrolled in the program.

When Peace Corps Volunteers return home, they do so with an intimate knowledge of other peoples and cultures. They understand that the ability of the United States to function in the world community depends on its understanding of other cultures. They know that global interdependence is a reality, not just a catchword. When Volunteers share their experiences with their World Wise classes, they help others to fashion a broader worldview.

GOALS OF *DESTINATION: HONDURAS*

Destination Honduras has been developed by Peace Corps' Office of World Wise Schools in response to the agency's third goal (see above). Designed to enhance your class's correspondence with your Peace Corps Volunteer, and to supplement your study of Central America or the environment, these materials allow students to:

1. Identify similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of young people in another country;

2. Apply fundamental geographic themes to the country of Honduras;

3. Research the geography and culture of their Peace Corps Volunteer 's host country.

Although study guide activities have been written for three levels, grades 3-5, grades 6-9, and grades 10-12, **you are encouraged to select the tasks from each section which are most appropriate for the interest and experience levels of your particular students.** For ease of selection, activities and worksheets have been arranged first by level and then by geographic theme.

World Wise Schools welcomes comments on all of its materials and encourages you to share with us the activities you or your colleagues develop and find effective.

This packet contains materials written by Peace Corps Volunteers and others that represent their individual views. These views are not official opinions of the United States Government or of the Peace Corps of the United States.

Please note that the videotape has been sent to your school in care of your librarian.

Peace Corps of the United States of America
Office of World Wise Schools
1990 K Street, N.W
Washington, D.C. 20526

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Elaine L. Chao, Director
Shirley Puchalski, Director of World Wise Schools
Margaret Legowski, Education Specialist

September 1992 – WWS 13T-92

FUNDAMENTAL THEMES IN GEOGRAPHY

Adapted from materials developed by social studies teachers of Baltimore County (Maryland) Public Schools and members of the Maryland Geographic Alliance. Used with permission.

LOCATION: Position on the Earth's Surface

All locations can be defined as precise points on the earth's surface identified by a grid system of latitude and longitude (absolute location). Location can also be communicated by describing a place in relationship to other places (relative location). Students learn about location when asked to:

- use direction, distance, scale, and standard symbols on a map;
- use a number/letter system or latitude and longitude to locate places on maps;
- suggest reasons for the location of a city, road, factory, school, or store.

PLACE: Physical and Human Characteristics

All places on the earth have distinctive features that give them meaning and character and distinguish them from other places. Places may be characterized by their physical features (climate and landforms) and human characteristics (population, settlement, and economics). Students learn about place when asked to:

- describe different kinds of shelters based on environment and culture;
- use text references and maps to describe the climatic characteristics of a nation or region;
- analyze a place based on a song, picture, or story.

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN PLACES: Humans and their Environments

Understanding the impact of humans on the environment involves learning about the physical and social factors that produce environmental change. People modify or adapt to natural settings in ways that reveal their cultural values, economic and political circumstances, and technological abilities. Students learn about relationships within places when asked to:

- evaluate how people use the physical environment to meet their needs;
- analyze the relationship between the use of natural resources and the economy of a region;
- describe environmental changes resulting from the use of tools/technology.

MOVEMENT: Humans Interacting on Earth

People interact with each other both locally and globally by travel, communication, and the exchange of goods and services. Visible evidence of global interdependence and the interaction of humans and places includes the movement of people, ideas, and materials. Students learn about movement when asked to:

- explain how the need for natural resources encouraged exploration and settlement;
- define examples of cultural borrowing and cultural diffusion;
- predict the impact of migration on an area.

REGIONS: How They Form and Change

A region is an area that displays unity in terms of selected characteristics that distinguish it from other areas. Some regions are defined by one characteristic such as government, language, or land; others by the interplay of many criteria. Regions may be redefined as criteria change. Students learn about regions when asked to:

- use selected criteria to outline geographic regions on maps;
- compare political, economic and social differences among regions;
- evaluate how the boundaries of a region might change.

OVERVIEW OF HONDURAS

The following overview has been adapted from an invitation book prepared by the Peace Corps of the United States for trainees preparing to serve in Honduras. The section on education was prepared by Kathryn Sorrentino from interviews with former Peace Corps Volunteers and staff.

Physical Description

Honduras is the second largest of the Central American Republics, with an area of approximately 43,278 square miles. Roughly comparable in size to the state of Ohio, it is bordered on the northwest by Guatemala, on the southwest by El Salvador, and on the southeast by Nicaragua. Its Pacific coastline consists of a 77-mile arc along the Gulf of Fonseca in the south. The Caribbean Sea coastline of 400 miles contains several excellent ports and makes the North Coast the commercial hub of Honduras. Several small offshore islands, of which the Bay Islands are the best known, are also part of the national territory.

Honduras is a mountainous country, with ranges of 3,000 to 9,000 feet in altitude covering nearly 80% of the nation. Though fertile valleys and plateaus lie between the mountains and in the coastal areas, it is estimated that only 17% of the land mass is suitable for agricultural development. The rugged terrain has to a great extent shaped Honduran social, political, and economic history, which, until recent years had been characterized by the isolation of its people, weak central governments, lack of national integration, and slow development.

The prevailing climate pattern is characterized by a wet season from May through October and a dry season from November to April. Climatic features are more pronounced in the coastal lowlands, particularly in the North Coast, where major hurricanes as well as severe floods and droughts have been experienced in recent years. Temperate conditions prevail in the higher elevations.

The country possesses some mineral resources, including gold, silver, lead, copper, zinc, iron, marble, limestone, and salt. The oil potential of the Caribbean seabed is currently being explored. However, at this point and for the foreseeable future, none of these is likely to become a major factor in the development of Honduras.

Highways connect the major western cities with the Caribbean and the Pacific. A short stretch of the Pan American Highway crosses part of the country.

About 45% of the land is covered with forests. The forests are without doubt one of the great natural resources of Honduras. Among the forests to be found are palm, pine, and broadleaf, including mahogany, Spanish cedar, balsa, and rosewood.

Salt and fresh water fish abound in commercially exploitable numbers. The Caribbean coast and Lake Yojoa stand out as internationally acclaimed fishing grounds. The natural scenic beauty and variety, favorable climate, and the semi-tropical setting of the country must also be considered significant natural resources with exploitable potential.

The population of the country in 1989 was estimated at approximately 5 million, or 45.6 persons per square kilometer. This is a relatively low density figure, particularly when compared to neighboring El Salvador and Guatemala. On the other hand, the population distribution and growth patterns are not favorable. The area that is suitable for settlement is limited, consequently the bulk of the population is concentrated in the Tegucigalpa, Comayagua, and San Pedro Sula Valleys and the North Coast, while the eastern quadrant of the country remains one of the most inaccessible and least inhabited areas of Central America. A birth rate of 49.3 per 1000 and a mortality rate of 14.2 result in

an annual rate of growth estimated in 1985 at 3.5%, among the highest in the world and the highest in Central America. This rate of growth has been reduced only slightly in the past five years, and will result in a population of over 6 million by the year 2000. Rapid population growth is placing increasing strain on the Government of Honduras's capacity to keep pace in providing health, economic, educational, and other services to its people.

Approximately 70% of the population is classified as rural, although migration to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities is contributing to the urbanization of Honduras. Sixty-six percent of the growth of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula over the last fifteen years can be attributed to migration from the countryside.

The population of Honduras is essentially homogeneous with 91% classified as mestizo; the balance consists primarily of Black Caribs (Garífuna) along the North Coast, small pockets of indigenous Lencas, and a number of Chinese and Arab immigrants. Spanish is universally spoken, although Garífuna as well as Carib and Indian dialects are also spoken within the various minority groups.

Economy

Agriculture and forestry are the bases of the economy, providing 60% of all jobs and two-thirds of the nation's exports. The major products for export are timber, bananas, meat, and coffee. Their production usually involves foreign capital and is highly developed.

While *campesinos* (com-pe-SEE-nose; farmers of small holdings) constitute the social majority, their contribution to the gross national product is minor because they still rely on old agricultural practices including slash-and-burn cultivation and the use of wooden plows.

Banana cultivation has dominated the economy and, to some extent, the social and political life of the country. Foreign investors established vast plantations on the North Coast, but they are resented by many Hondurans. One company, however, United Fruit, built the first railroads in the country in order to link its plantations with the banana shipping ports.

Honduras also exports small quantities of gold and silver, but its mineral resources are largely unexplored.

Social Structure and Culture

Honduran society is a mixture of Hispanic and Indian traditions rapidly being superseded by Western values, particularly those emanating from the United States. The extended family is the basic social unit and kinship ties are still strong. This is reflected in the economic and political life of the country, where social and professional relationships are intertwined, with social ties often outweighing professional considerations.

The small, urban-oriented middle class, composed of government officials, school teachers, army officers, merchants, and industrialists, provides most of the momentum and leadership, and its values (respectability, morality, interest in education, etc.) have increasingly become the accepted norms of society. Disdain for the manual labor of the lower classes and the unearned wealth of the old aristocracy also forms part of the middle-class value system.

The lower class is by far the largest and consists of the urban poor (about 50% of the urban population) and most of the rural population. Low levels of education and income and limited access to opportunities are their common denominator. Because education can bring upward mobility the

Honduran lower class cannot be considered as submissive, unreachable, or oppressed as in other societies. In fact, the *campesino* is emerging as a potent voice in the affairs of the nation and his support is becoming politically critical.

Most Hondurans are Roman Catholics. While the Church has traditionally been a conservative force in the country, in recent years it has become more responsive to the nation's social and economic needs. There is freedom of religion and other Christian denominations are enjoying greater acceptance.

Honduras has been and continues to be a male-dominated society, although barriers are being gradually broken. Women have the right to vote and own property. In the urban areas, divorce is becoming more accepted. As educational opportunities have opened to women of the middle and upper classes, women have begun playing a more active role in the professional world. Women's professional organizations are becoming politically important. For the first time, women are being admitted into the police force. Nevertheless, traditions, particularly in the rural areas, are strong and the "proper place" for women is still regarded as "in the home."

Political Structure

Honduras is a republic with a constitutional structure of government similar to that of the United States, with provisions for three branches of government (president, legislature, and judiciary), and popular election of officials at local and national levels.

Honduras's political history has been unstable, with twelve constitutions and over 50 presidents or chiefs of state since 1824. In January 1990, Rafael Leonardo Callejas Romero was inaugurated as President. Callejas is the nation's third democratically-elected president in ten years.

For administrative purposes, Honduras is divided into 18 departments, each with an appointed political governor. Departments are further subdivided into 282 municipalities (roughly comparable to U.S. counties).

Due to their weak structures and limited tax base, local governments are generally dependent on the central government. Authority clearly remains in the hands of the central government.

The government of Honduras adheres to principles of constitutional democracy. Political expression is relatively free and the press, in particular, articulates opposing views.

Education

Schools in Honduras can be considered public or private, primary or secondary, university or agricultural in focus. Primary schools include grades one through six, and secondary schools include grades seven through twelve. According to the constitution of Honduras, education is free and compulsory for students between the ages of seven and fourteen.

The quality and quantity of education in Honduras varies considerably between private and public institutions, as well as between schools in rural and urban areas. According to authors Barry and Norsworthy in *Honduras: A Country Guide*, a recent survey showed that "the more than 800 private educational institutions in the country served five percent of primary students, 50 percent of secondary students, and three percent of university students." Private schools, particularly in urban areas, generally have better facilities, more teachers, and more materials than their public counterparts, although there has been concern that private schools are "profit-making ventures." Some secondary students must pay tuition for their education, although a limited number of secondary schools are fully

government financed (public) or partially subsidized (semi-private). Secondary schools cover business, teacher training, and vocational education curricula. Students must also pay to attend Honduras's national university, the National Autonomous University of Honduras, although the fee is moderate because the university is subsidized by the government (6% of the total federal budget is earmarked to support the National University). The University, which has campuses in Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, and La Ceiba, serves almost 31,000 students. The Pan American Agricultural School, a renowned agricultural junior college founded by the United Fruit Company of the United States, is located near Tegucigalpa. Many of the students attending this prestigious college come from such South and Central American countries as Ecuador, Bolivia, and Panama.

Children in Honduras begin their school careers at age seven when they enter grade one. Primary institutions include one-room rural schools as well as large urban schools, where the basic subjects (reading, math, social studies, and science) are taught. When teachers are available, English is offered in urban private schools and in public and private secondary schools. At the secondary level, teachers are generally trained in subject areas rather than in teaching methodology; most learning is done by rote.

Honduras's academic year begins in February and continues until November when schools close for a two-month summer vacation. The school week lasts from Monday through Friday, and the typical five hour day usually takes place in one of two or three shifts, depending upon the community's needs for space, books, and teachers. Children usually attend either a morning shift that lasts from 7 A.M. to noon, or an afternoon shift that lasts from 1 P.M. to 5 P.M. In some urban areas, working adults attend the third shift which lasts from 6 P.M. to 10 P.M.

Honduras's rapid population growth has placed great strain on its public and private school systems. Classes of forty to fifty students, with two or more children sharing desks, books, and chairs, are common. Moreover, it is not uncommon in rural areas to find up to sixty students from three different grades in one classroom with one teacher. Because all families are required to buy uniforms and books for their children, many children, particularly in rural areas, drop out of school after sixth grade. To ensure that at least one member of the family be educated, many families select one or two children to attend both primary and secondary school. The rest of the children stay at home to help with household and farm chores.

Peace Corps Volunteers are currently working with their Honduran counterparts in programs that focus on primary and secondary curriculum development, adult literacy, special education, environmental education, and teacher training.

TROPICAL RAIN FORESTS

The following information has been reprinted with permission of the National Wildlife Federation from the "Rain Forests: Tropical Treasures" issue of NatureScope.

Two hundred years ago, tropical rain forests circled the globe in an almost unbroken green belt that encompassed Latin America, Africa, South Asia, Indonesia, and Australia and covered about 20 percent of the earth's land surface. Today, rain forests cover less than 7 percent of the earth's land surface, and the once-continuous strip is now broken up into a series of green pockets. . . . Pockets of rain forest lie both north and south of the equator, bordered on the north by the Tropic of Cancer and on the south by the Tropic of Capricorn. Although rain forests grow in more than 50 countries, more than half the total area is found in just three countries: Brazil with 33 percent and Zaire and Indonesia with 10 percent each.

What Are Tropical Rain Forests?

Hot, Humid, and Wet: Tropical rain forests are characterized by hot, humid weather throughout the year. By definition, they get more than 60 inches of rain a year, although some areas regularly get more than 200 inches and a few get more than 400! Temperatures sometimes climb into the 90s but usually hover between 70° and 85° F.

In most tropical rain forests, the temperature variation during the year is small, and there is very little variance between daytime highs and nighttime lows. Consistently high temperatures are characteristic of lands that hug the equator. And unlike other regions of the world, these equatorial areas get more energy from the sun because they experience year-round, 12-hour days, and because the sun's rays strike the equator at right angles, providing more intense and direct sunlight.

Consistently high temperatures and abundant rainfall contribute to another tropical rain forest characteristic – high humidity. In the rain forests of South America, scientists estimate that as much as 250 billion tons of water vapor can be suspended in the air at any one time. The abundant water vapor in tropical rain forests is also a result of a high rate of plant transpiration. On the average, the humidity in a forest is about 70 percent during the day and 95 percent at night.

Luxuriant and Diverse: The moist, hot conditions in tropical rain forests support an abundant diversity of plant life – from luxuriant shrubs and ferns to climbing vines and giant trees. The plants, in turn, support an amazingly varied community of wildlife.

Although tropical rain forests cover less than 7 percent of the earth's land surface, scientists estimate that they may house more than 50 percent of all species. In fact, some scientists calculate that this figure could actually be much higher, given the number of new species that are constantly being discovered in tropical rain forests.

Shallow, Damp, and Infertile: Rain forest soils support an incredible variety of plants, but the soil itself is often not very fertile. Most of the nutrients that are used by plants are stored in the plants themselves, not in the soil. In other types of forests, such as temperate forests, the soils are often much more nutrient-rich.

The lack of nutrients in tropical rain forest soil is the result of two things: abundant rainfall and age. In all forests, rain washes away, or leaches, important nutrients from the soil – but leaching can be an especially serious problem in rain forests because there is so much rain and it comes in such intense and frequent bursts. And in many areas where tropical rain forests grow, the soils are relatively old and have been leached for millions of years, leaving very few mineral nutrients. . . .

Rain Forest Layers

The trees, shrubs, vines, ferns, and other plants that grow in rain forests form a complex system of layers. Although the layering system varies from area to area and the boundaries between layers are often not distinct, a generalized cross section would look something like the picture on the

worksheet "Tropical Rain Forests" in the section for grades 3-5. Here's more about each layer, starting at the top and working down.

The Emergents: Towering above all the other plants in the forest are the giant trees called emergents. Although most emergents are about 115 to 150 feet tall, some grow to heights of over 250 feet. There are usually only one or two of these jungle giants per acre, and characteristically they have relatively small leaves, umbrella-shaped crowns, and tall, slender trunks. Emergents stick out from the crowd and must endure high and often changing temperatures, low humidity, and strong winds. . . .

The Canopy: Like a thick green carpet, the main canopy layer of the rain forest is formed by flat-crowned trees that are often between 65 and 100 feet above the ground. Like the emergents, trees in the canopy are subjected to changing temperature and humidity. The canopy trees, along with the emergents, form a continuous covering over the forest. The canopy acts like a giant sun and rain umbrella. It catches most of the sun's rays, allowing only about 2 to 5 percent to slip through to the forest floor. The canopy also absorbs much of the impact of the rain that falls on the forest. . . .

The canopy is filled with life. The umbrella of leaves and branches provides a home for many treetop creatures, as well as for orchids, vines, bromeliads, and a host of other plants.

The Understory: Below the canopy there are small trees that usually don't grow to heights of more than 15 feet or so, and a shorter shrub layer of very young canopy trees and miniature woody plants. Together, these plants make up the understory. Some of these understory plants will eventually grow tall enough to become part of the canopy. But others will always remain in the shadow of the canopy giants. . . . Many also have large leaves, which scientists think help plants absorb as much as they can in the dim understory.

The Forest Floor: On the forest floor, often more than 65 feet below the canopy, the conditions are very different from those at the top. The canopy is subjected to strong sun and plenty of wind, causing considerable daily fluctuations in humidity and temperature. But on the sheltered floor, the air is very still, humidity is almost always above 70 percent, and the temperature remains relatively constant.

Although seedlings, herbs, and ferns grow on the forest floor, the vegetation is fairly sparse -- mainly because of lack of sunlight. And although many people think the rain forest floor is littered with decaying logs and thick layers of dead leaves, the floor is actually quite open.

About Jungles

. . . Moist tropical forests that lie close to the equator at low elevations are commonly called tropical rain forests. However, much of what we say about tropical rain forests -- especially when we talk about the problems of deforestation -- also holds true for two other types of forests found in the tropics: tropical seasonal forests and tropical cloud forests. Tropical seasonal forests occur throughout the tropics and have two distinct seasons -- a wet season and a dry season. They differ from tropical rain forests in that they don't get abundant, year-round rainfall and they experience seasonal periods of drought.

Cloud forests are tropical forests that grow at middle to high elevations. These mountainous jungles are kept moist by mist and clouds, as well as by rain. Found in mountains throughout the tropics, cloud forests are denser and have shorter trees than tropical rain forests, and ferns, mosses, and liverworts often grow more thickly on tree branches. In some areas these forests are better known as "moss forests." Unlike lowland tropical rain forests, cloud forests can become relatively cool.

Where does the word jungle fit into our tropical rain forest definitions? Etymologists have traced the word to the ancient Sanskrit word *jangala*, which was used to describe thick, impenetrable vegetation. Today jungle is the popular term for tropical forests in general. Although many people use the word "jungle" interchangeably with "tropical rain forest," the literal definition of the word misrepresents what a tropical rain forest is actually like. Tropical rain forests are not impenetrable masses of vegetation. Instead, in a mature tropical forest the forest floor is fairly open and uncluttered.

People probably first used the word "jungle" to describe tropical forests when they traveled by boat to explore these areas. Along tropical riverbanks and openings in the forests, tangled "jungle" vegetation does spring up. That's because in open areas much more sunlight reaches the ground and encourages plant growth. Many early explorers mistakenly assumed that the inside of a rain forest was just like its overgrown edges.

Tangled undergrowth is not the only rain forest myth that has been perpetuated through the years. Another is that rain forests, with their thick vegetation and abundant wildlife, are "tough" and can withstand changing conditions without serious consequences. Unfortunately, this isn't true, and as more development takes place in the tropics, people are finding out just how fragile rain forest ecosystems are. . . .

Future Shock

People have manipulated their surroundings since before early humans learned to build fires and wield stone axes. And sometimes our actions have caused permanent damage to natural habitats. But the rate and scale of the ecological, social, and economic damage we're causing today in tropical rain forests far surpasses anything we've experienced before. And many scientists think that the long-term effects of tropical deforestation could be much more devastating and far-reaching than most people expect.

Some scientists point to the loss of plant and animal species as one of the most tragic results of tropical deforestation. Collectively, rain forests are the most diverse habitats on earth – and with every acre of rain forest we clear, we're chipping away at that diversity at a rate that some people estimate may be as high as six extinctions per hour. Some of the plants, insects, and other species we're losing are dying out before we even know they exist. By destroying natural diversity, we're not only destroying natural communities – we're depriving ourselves of potential foods, medicines, and other products.

We're also causing changes in the ecology of areas that are nowhere near tropical forests. Many of "our" familiar songbirds, for example, fly to the tropics for the winter. And some songbird populations have been declining steadily in the past several years, probably because their winter habitats in tropical areas are disappearing. A lot of these songbirds feed mostly on insects, and nobody knows yet what effect this decline in songbird populations is having on insects in the birds' summer habitats. But we do know that many of these insects feed on plants, including agricultural crops.

As we carve rain forests into smaller and smaller chunks, we may also be tampering with weather patterns. Rain forest trees add a lot of moisture to the air as excess water evaporates from their leaves, and this moisture eventually falls as rain. Some areas that have been deforested have experienced droughts because the loss of trees disrupted the area's water cycle. And some scientists think that the cumulative effect of tropical deforestation worldwide could also interfere with global weather patterns.

Many scientists also feel that rain forest destruction may be contributing to the global warming we're experiencing because of the "greenhouse effect." As rain forests burn, carbon is released from the vegetation and mixes with atmospheric oxygen to form carbon dioxide. Excess carbon dioxide acts like a blanket in the atmosphere, trapping heat against the earth and ultimately causing the planet to warm up.

The Challenge

Deforestation in the tropics isn't a straightforward problem that can be traced to just one or two sources. It's the result of a combination of social, political, and economic problems, and it's aggravated by the special characteristics of tropical topography, soils, and other physical features. And the effects of deforestation are as complex as the causes. Finding solutions to this sticky web of issues is proving to be a major challenge – but it's a challenge we won't be able to ignore.

GRADES 3-5
INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

THEME: LOCATION

1. **Political World? (pp.)**

Activity Ideas:

- Distribute copies of the map to pairs of students. Ask students to decide what is wrong with the map. Working in partners, ask students to label the oceans (1. Pacific, 2. Atlantic, 3. Arctic, 4. Indian). Ask students to pick out the correctly labeled continent (Antarctica). Correctly label the remaining continents.

- Ask students to locate Central America and then Honduras. Describe the location of Honduras in as many ways as they can.

- Using available maps and atlases or following your directions ("It's north of ____ and southwest of ____."), have students locate your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country. Describe its location in relation to Honduras or the United States. Ask questions such as: Which is further from the United States, Honduras or your Volunteer's country? How much further?

2. **Find the Treasure (pp.)**

Background Information:

The following activity has been adapted from "Find the Sunken Treasure," by S. Hicks in Social Studies and the Young Learner, November/December 1988. The map is an adaptation of a map which appears in the Honduran social studies textbook Nuestro Pais: Estudios Sociales edited by Miguel Navarro, Honduras: Publicaciones Navarro, 1992. All materials from Nuestro Pais are used with permission.

Activity Ideas:

- Explain that the map is from an elementary social studies textbook used in Honduras. Ask students to identify the language in which *Mar Caribe* and *Océano Pacífico* are written. Ask: What do these words mean (Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean)?

- Using available maps and globes, have students work in pairs to label the map. Color in Honduras.

- Have students stay with their partners, then distribute individual copies of the map of Central America. Explain how to play "Find the Treasure" (a variation of "Battleship"):

  a. The object of the game is to locate two out of three gold mines on your opponent's grid map.
  b. Players should hide their maps from one another throughout the game. (Students may want to set up screens using books.)
  c. Each player places three gold mines in three different grids on the map. The mines must be on land.
  d. Partners decide who will go first. The player calls a letter and number pair (such as C2). The opponent checks his or her own map. If there is no gold mine on this spot, the player calls "miss." If there is a gold mine on this spot, the player calls "find." (To avoid repeats, the student who is calling the locations should put a check in the boxes he or she calls.)
  e. The game continues until two out of three gold mines are "found" on the map.

- Have students research the actual locations of gold or silver mines in Central America. What was the role of gold and silver in the Age of Exploration?

- Distribute copies of maps of the region in which your Peace Corps Volunteer lives. Have students work in pairs to create a game that will enable their classmates to practice using grid locations.

- Ask your Peace Corps Volunteer about the minerals and other natural resources in his or her host country. How has the availability of these resources affected its history and development?

THEME: PLACE

1. **Dear Friends (pp.)**

Background Information:

World Wise School teacher, Roberta King of E.F. Leddy School in Taunton, Massachusetts, sent us this letter from Peace Corps Volunteer Karen Fromhold. Karen introduces students to the role of a Peace Corps Volunteer and gives students an idea of what it means to live in rural Honduras.

Activity Ideas:

- Locate the following places on a map of Honduras: Tegucigalpa (Tay-goo-see-GAL-pa), Santa Rosa de Copan (SAHN-ta RO-sa day ko-PAHN).

- Discuss: What does a Peace Corps Volunteer do? Why?

- Read aloud "Dear Friends." Ask students to listen for the job of a Peace Corps Volunteer, and the similarities and differences between life in Karen's village and life in your town. Discuss.

- Have students use context clues to explain the meaning of the underlined words in the story: department, culture, agriculture, rainy season, contaminated, cholera, and *tortillas*.

- As a class, have students list everything in the room that runs on electricity. List everything at home that runs on electricity. For homework, challenge students not to use electricity at home. Discuss the next day: What activities did they have to eliminate? What activities did they substitute?

- To give your students a better understanding of village school life, teacher and former Peace Corps Volunteer Betty Rosentrater of Nappanee, Indiana, suggests the following activity:

  > Pretend for one day that the class is in a typical school in Honduras. Children should wear blue pants or skirts and white tops. No movies or audio visual aids (other than chalkboard and colored chalk for the teacher) should be used. Children should only have paper and pencils -- no textbooks, models, or lights should be used. Playground equipment should be off-limits for the day; make only one ball available to the whole class. Children should bring their own drinking water to school. The teacher will need to be resourceful and energetic.
  >
  > Care must be taken to not downgrade Honduras, but to show how eager they are for education. Usually a new respect and appreciation for our many advantages develops.

- Have students send brief descriptions of life in Pastoreadero (Pah-STOR-ee-ah-DARE-oh) to your Peace Corps Volunteer. Find out if life in his or her village is similar to life in Honduras. Ask what it's like to live without electricity.

2. **Spanish Words in U. S. Place Names (pp.)**

Background Information:

Although many local languages are represented in Honduras, Spanish is the official language, and the language spoken by the majority. Use this activity from Global Geography by Tom Collins and former Peace Corps Volunteer Paul Mulloy to begin study of the language of your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country, or to introduce the idea of language families and language migration.

Activity Ideas:

- Introduce this activity by writing *costa, pueblo,* and *boca* on the chalkboard. Explain that each term has a geographic meaning (coast, town, mouth), and that each is used in place names in the United States. Tell students that in some areas of the United States there are strong links to Spanish language and culture. One way to determine the location and extent of this connection is to see how many places have Spanish terms in their names.

- Using atlases of the United States and the worksheet "Spanish Words in U.S. Place Names," have students work in pairs to find places in the United States that have the Spanish terms in their names. Advanced students can find the places on a map and give their longitude and latitude.

- Discuss: In which part of the country were most of these place names found? Why? How does language travel?

- Write to your Peace Corps Volunteer about the languages spoken in his or her country. Have any of the local words come from Spanish or English? How?

3. **A Clever Idea (pp.)**

Background Information

Festivals -- whether to celebrate a saint, childhood, or independence -- are an integral part of urban and rural life in Honduras. Dia del Niño, celebrated in September, is a day set aside to honor children. Although school is in session at this time, many special activities with music and dance are enjoyed.

"A Clever Idea" was adapted by Kathryn Sorrentino from "Juan" in What a Child Can Do, published by the Canadian Red Cross Society, 1986.

Activity Ideas:

- Have students tell about experiences they've had with kites OR about the things they do at home to help their parents (e.g., set the table, make their beds, etc.).

- Locate Honduras on a map of the world. Have students describe its location in as many ways as they can. Ask them if it would be possible to drive to Honduras; have them describe the route they would have to take. How long would the trip be?

- List the Spanish words in the story on the board (see list at end of this section). If it is appropriate, ask a student who studies or speaks Spanish to teach the class how to pronounce the words. Ask the class to listen for clues to the meaning of the words as they listen to the story. Read aloud "A Clever Idea." Discuss the meaning of the Spanish words using context clues. Ask students to explain the clues that gave them the meaning of the word.

- Give students a chance to illustrate the story: (1) Divide the class into small groups. (2) Give each group a copy of the story which has been cut up into sections. (3) Have each student in the group choose

a section to illustrate. (4) Have each group make a book by putting their sections together. Suggestion: Give students the chance to read their books to younger classes.

- Have older students rewrite "A Clever Idea" as if it were taking place in the United States or in your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country.
- Have students make kites using newspapers, gift wrap, or other recycled materials. Read about other countries that use kites in their celebrations. Have a school kite festival.
- Ask your Peace Corps Volunteer about important festivals and holidays in his or her host country. Ask about the responsibilities of children, too.

Vocabulary: "A Clever Idea"

Dia del Niño (DEE-ah del NEEN-yo)	"Day of the Child"; a September holiday that honors children
Buenos dias (boo-AY-noss DEE-ahs)	"Good Day" or "Good Morning"
Caesar (say-ZAR)	A boy's name
Felipe (Fay-LEAP or fay-LEAP-ay)	A boy's name (Philip)
Frijoles (free-HOL-ays)	Beans
Juan (WAN)	A boy's name (John)
El periodico (L pair-ee-OH-dee-co)	Newspaper
Mango (MANG-go)	Tropical fruit with green or reddish skin, orange pulp, and a large stone; similar to a peach in taste
Pollo asado (PO-yo as-SA-do)	Baked chicken
Señor (sen-YOUR)	Mister
Tamale (ta-MAH-lay)	A cornmeal dough filled with meat or vegetables, then steamed in a cornhusk or banana leaf
Tortilla (tor-TEE-ya)	Pancake-like patty made with corn or flour

THEME: RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN PLACES

1. **How Heavy Is Life (pp.)**

Background Information:

For those working and living in many parts of the world, "fever" (be it dengue or malaria) is a real and serious threat. In Honduras, Peace Corps Volunteers work with the people in their villages to change the local conditions (e.g., stagnant pools of water, open sewers, uncovered latrines) favored by disease-bearing mosquitos. "How Heavy Is Life," a play about the efforts of the people of Talanga, Honduras, to combat mosquito-borne disease, was sent to us by former Peace Corps Volunteer Betty Rosentrater of Nappanee, Indiana. Betty writes:

I was involved in environmental education and the going seemed slow. There were no audio-visuals, but there was enthusiasm and certainly need since many people suffered from malaria, dengue [DENG-ee] fever, and other mosquito-borne diseases. After learning and presenting this play, one class refused to sit beside the open, running sewer. With permission, they all went home and brought back tools to clean up the place. The example spread. Several businesses brought in sand and got rid of stagnant pools around their places. With things looking better, a few people began painting their homes and planting flowers. They even hired someone to keep the town square clean.

Curriculum tie-ins? Health and environment (breeding places, ways to combat mosquitos, disease); science (metamorphosis); language arts (reading, expression, and drama); art (props and costumes).

Activity Ideas:

- Ask students to tell what they know about mosquitos. Lead them to a discussion of diseases that are carried by mosquitos, the purpose of window screens, and so on.
- If the child would be comfortable in this role, ask a student who speaks or studies Spanish to teach the class how to pronounce the Spanish words in the play: *hijo, hija, la gente, la gente de Talanga, mamá, hola, contento, zancudos, adios, sí, nimfas, la letrina, por siempre viva la gente.* See if students can guess the meaning of the words based on the way they sound or look.
- Assign parts and have the class read the play aloud. (To actively involve more students have two people read each part; all children without parts can read the part of *La Gente* -- the people.) After reading the play, have students use context clues to define the Spanish words. Discuss why and how the people of Talanga "got rid of" the mosquitos. Compare mosquito problems and solutions in Honduras with mosquito problems and solutions in the United States. **Stress that, similar to things like matches and lighter fluid, kerosene and lime are strong poisons that the students should not play near or handle.**
- Have older students rewrite the play from the perspective of the villagers.
- Work with the science teacher to have students research and draw pictures of the life cycle of the mosquito. Investigate the relationship between stagnant water and mosquitos.
- Write a class poem or song entitled "The Mighty Mosquito." Include a description of the life-cycle of the mosquito or the dangers of mosquito-borne disease.
- Invite someone from your local health department to talk to your students about reasons for local mosquito control in the past and in the present.
- Ask your Peace Corps Volunteer about problems with insect-borne diseases in his or her area. What are people doing to solve these problems?

2. **Tropical Rain Forests (pp.)**

Please see "Background Information for Teachers" for a description of tropical rain forests.

Activity Ideas:

- Color the picture on the worksheet. As a class, brainstorm a list of responses to the questions on the worksheet "Tropical Rain Forests." Refer to and amend this list after each activity.
- Use this activity from *The Rain Forest and Its Future: Education Packet* by Denise M. Stromme (Washington, D.C.: World Wildlife Fund), to explain the layers of the rain forest:

Have four children, each representing a different forest layer, stand in front of one another:

1. First layer (***emergents***): One student raises his or her arms up as if reaching for the sun.
2. Second layer (***canopy***): The second student holds his or her arms out front in a circle as if they are an umbrella.
3. Third layer (***understory***): The third student kneels with arms stretched out to the side as if they are the branches of young trees.
4. Fourth layer (***forest floor***): This student lies on the floor with arms flat.

- After doing the above activity, divide students into groups of four. When you say "Go!" each person in the group should take the position of one of the four rain forest layers so that the group makes a complete rain forest. When all of the "forests" are complete, walk around taking out certain layers (children). Ask the class how the absence of the layer would affect the rest of the forest. Emphasize that all four layers are necessary for the forest to survive.

- While students are sitting together in their forest groups, read aloud "A Rough Experience" from the grade six through nine section of the study guide. Afterwards, have students act out the story.

- Using the questions on the worksheet "Tropical Rain Forests" as a guide, have students work in pairs to gather basic facts about tropical rain forests. Use videotapes, books, pictures and the assistance of the science teacher/school librarian for this project.

- Write to your Peace Corps Volunteer about the tropical rain forests or protected areas in his or her country. What animals live there? How are the daily lives of the people in his or her village affected by changes in the rain forest (or other ecosystem)? What is being done to protect these areas?

3. **Jungle in the House (p.)**

Background Information:

This activity is an adaptation of "Jungle in the Pantry" from the "Rain Forests: Tropical Treasures" issue of NatureScope published by the National Wildlife Federation.

Activity Ideas:

- Bring in several items from the list "Jungle in the House." Have students identify the items.

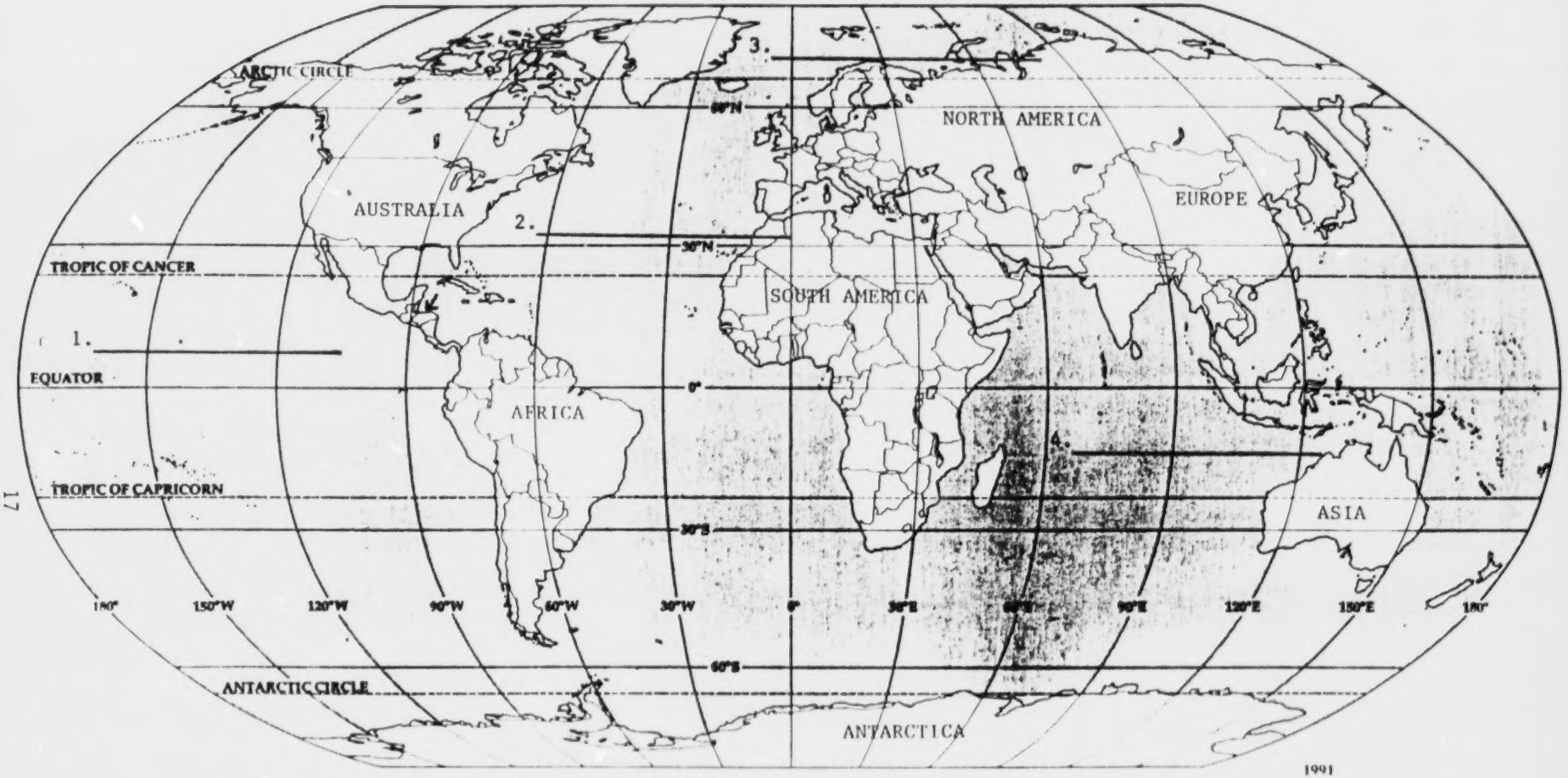
- Review the list with the class. For homework, ask them to work with a parent or an older brother or sister to find as many items as they can in their house. (Alternatively, have students work in small groups to make scrapbooks of "Tropical Treasures" using pictures from magazines or student art.) Discuss: What things in your house would change if all the tropical rain forests in the world disappeared?

- Take a class trip to a local grocery store and have students work in pairs to locate items on the list. Suggestion: Have students note the aisle numbers or prices of the items they find.

- Ask your Peace Corps Volunteer about the economic links his or her host country has with the United States. How do these connections directly affect the lives of people in his or her village?

4. **Topics for Further Research**

The Mayans
Medicines from Tropical Rain Forests
Spanish-American Festivals
Sports Around the World



Political World?

0 1000 2000 3000 4000 MILES
0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 KILOMETERS

Map reprinted with permission from *Directions in Geography: A Guide for Teachers*, Copyright © 1991, National Geographic Society.

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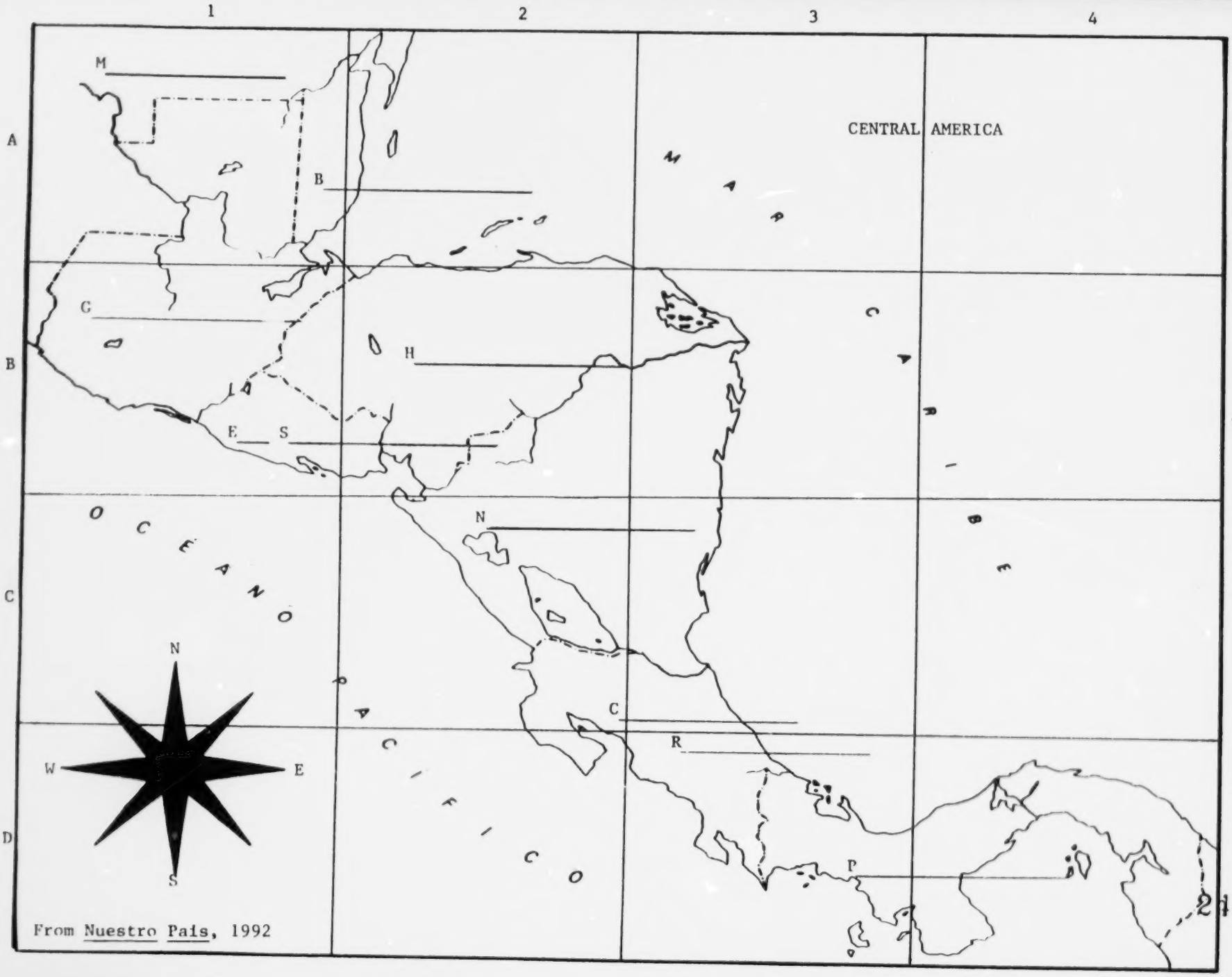

From Nuestro País, 1992

23

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November 7, 1991

Dear Friends:

Hello and greetings from Honduras! My name is Karen Fromhold and I am a Peace Corps Volunteer here in Honduras. I am 24 years old and am from Michigan. I arrived in Honduras at the end of February this year. The first three months here I had training classes to help me learn Spanish, learn about Honduras and the culture here, and to prepare me for my work in health education. After my three months of training I began working and living in a village called Pastoreadero (Pah-STORE-ee-ah-DARE-ah) located in the department of Copan. Just like the United States is divided into states, Honduras is divided into departments. Copan is a department in the western half of the country and it borders on Guatemala. Pastoreadero probably won't be on your maps because it is quite small, but it is close to the towns of La Entrada, Florida and Santa Rosa.

Before I explain any more about Honduras I would like to explain what it means to be a Peace Corps Volunteer and why we are here. I think some of you have heard of Peace Corps and have ideas of what it means, but I imagine that some have not so I will explain briefly. Peace Corps is a program of the U.S. government that gives Americans the opportunity to volunteer their work in another country. Peace Corps Volunteers work in developing countries all over the world. We work with the people to try and help them improve their lives. For example, I am working in health and trying to help people learn new, healthier, ways to care for their children. People in developing countries are poorer money-wise than most of the people in the United States and have problems getting clean water, getting enough food for their families, finding reliable transportation, and many other things that we think of as basic and take for granted in the United States.

Although the people are poorer here, the idea of Peace Corps is not only that we help them. Another idea of Peace Corps is that Americans should learn about other cultures, other ways of thinking about life, and other languages so that we can better understand people from other countries. Peace Corps Volunteers live in the communities they work in so we can understand the problems people face and can become friends.

So, those are two of the things that I think are most important about Peace Corps. We work with people to try and help them improve their lives. And, just as important, we live here with the people to learn about and share in their lives. It is good to make friends in other countries and to understand how people live in other parts of the world.

That is what I am trying to do here in Honduras. As I said before, the village I am living in is called Pastoreadero and it is pretty small. About 600 people live here. Most of the people work in agriculture, especially in beans and corn. Right now they are also harvesting coffee. Also, you may have heard that lots of the bananas in

the United States come from Honduras. That is true and Honduras grows a lot of bananas, but that is in a different part of the country close to the Caribbean coast.

This part of Honduras, Copan, is very mountainous and beautiful. I don't know about where you live, but most of Michigan is very flat so I love to see mountains here. It is also all very green right now because it is the rainy season.

Life here in Pastoreadero is a lot different from life in the United States. For one thing, we don't have electricity here. This really changes the way people spend their time. Without television, people here spend a lot more time visiting their neighbors and talking. When children have free time they usually play outside or help their parents with errands and with the work that needs to be done. Since we don't have electricity people also tend to go to bed earlier and get up earlier in the morning.

Most houses in the village have water. The water is usually fairly clean to use for bathing and washing dishes but is not clean enough to drink. To be clean enough to drink, the water must always be boiled. Drinking contaminated water can cause children to be sick with diarrhea. You can also get other diseases like cholera by drinking dirty water. Cholera is a very serious disease (people can die from it) that is in this part of the world right now. Maybe you have read something about it in a newspaper? Almost no one gets these types of diseases in the U.S. because we now have safe, clean water to drink.

The food here is also very different. There are definitely no fast-food hamburgers here! Most people eat the food that's produced here such as beans, corn and coffee. With the corn they make *tortillas* [thin, flat pancakes made of cornmeal] to eat with the beans. All families here eat beans and *tortillas* and some also have eggs, milk, cheese, and occasionally chicken and vegetables. There are a lot of cows in this area so a lot of people can get milk.

Well, those are some basic facts about Pastoreadero and the life here. Now, I would like to explain something about the school here. In Pastoreadero there is one school for grades 1-6. It is a small school with only two teachers. There are a lot of students for those two teachers -- about 75. Many children only go to school for a few years and cannot continue because they need to help their parents with work in the house or in agriculture. Very few children go to school beyond sixth grade because the high school is in another town. The school year here begins in February and ends in mid-November. Tomorrow is the last day of exams for the children here and then they will begin their vacation.

Please write back soon. We are looking forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,
Karen Fromhold
Peace Corps Volunteer

SPANISH WORDS IN U.S. PLACE NAMES

DIRECTIONS: Find a place in the United States that has each of these words in its name. Next to the name, write the longitude and latitude for the center of that particular place. The first one has been done for you.

1. *amarillo* (yellow): Amarillo, Texas 101° W 35° N
2. *blanco* (white): _____
3. *boca* (mouth, estuary): _____
4. *cerro, morro* (hill): _____
5. *colorado* (reddish): _____
6. *costa* (coast): _____
7. *de, del* (of): _____
8. *este* (east): _____
9. *grand(e)* (big): _____
10. *laguna* (lagoon): _____
11. *los, las* (the): _____
12. *nevada* (snowfall): _____
13. *norte* (north): _____
14. *oriente* (east): _____
15. *paso* (pass): _____
16. *pueblo* (town, village): _____
17. *rio* (river): _____
18. *sierra* (mountain): _____
19. *sur* (south): _____
20. *vegas* (fertile lowland, plain): _____

Activity developed by Paul Mulloy and Tom Collins, Global Links Project, Washington, D.C. (From *Global Geography*, Massachusetts Geographic Alliance/Social Science Education Consortium, 1990). Used with permission.

A CLEVER IDEA

It was five o'clock in the morning. Juan jumped out of bed and pulled on his clothes. "Today's the day!" he thought excitedly. He grabbed his kite and swooped around the bedroom. It was Dia del Niño and when Juan had sold all his papers, he would be able to take his kite to the park to display it in the festival.

"Juan! Don't wake Felipe and Caesar," his mother called in a sleepy voice. "Are you playing with that kite again? You'll be late for your papers. You're going to have to work fast to sell them all before the festival this afternoon."

Juan slung his kite over his shoulder, grabbed two tortillas and a mango for breakfast, and ran out the door.

He arrived at the corner just as Señor Vargas drove up in the van. "Buenos dias, Juan!" he called, and threw three bundles of newspapers onto the sidewalk. "How's the kite going?"

"Look! It's all finished," Juan called back. "I'm going to display it this afternoon at the festival kite show!"

"See you at the park then," Señor Vargas shouted to Juan as he drove off.

Juan picked up the heavy bundles of papers and started walking. He had to walk one block to reach his selling place on the sidewalk between an office building and a tourist hotel. It was a lonely walk this morning; there weren't many people around.

"I wish you were going to soar like an eagle," said Juan, holding up his kite. Unfortunately, there was no space for kite flying in the crowded city. The bird's paper feathers fluttered in the morning breeze. Its gold foil beak gleamed in the sunlight of the dawn. Its long tail of old scarves streamed lazily behind Juan.

At his selling spot, Juan carefully put his papers in three piles for the three different Spanish newspapers he sold.

"Periodicos!" he called out. "Buy your papers here!" Juan sold a few papers, but for some reason business was not as good as usual. "It must be

because of the holiday," he thought. "Some of the workers must have taken the day off so they can go to the celebrations with their families."

But Juan had to sell his papers before he could go to the festival. Every penny he earned was needed by his family to help pay for rent, clothing, food, and school supplies. "Periodicos! Buy your papers here!" he called louder than before. But few people were on the streets today to buy his papers.

"I'm never going to get these papers sold in time for the festival," Juan thought. His mother, Felipe, and Caesar would be there, enjoying a picnic of pollo asado, frijoles, and mangos, and joining in the singing and dancing. They would all see the fantastic kites displayed. But Juan would be lucky to get there in time for the fireworks.

"There must be something I can do," he thought. "I can't just stand here all day." Then he had an idea. "I know how I can go to the festival, show my kite, and sell my papers."

Quickly, Juan gathered up his unsold papers, slung his kite over his shoulder, and ran off to the park. At the park, crowds were streaming in for the festival. Families had found places for their picnics. People were gathered around dancers and musicians. Children were already hanging kites for display in the open courtyard, but Juan couldn't join the children there yet.

Instead, he found a spot next to a fence near one of the busiest entrance gates. Once again, he set out his newspapers in three neat piles. But this time he also got his kite out. He draped it over the fence. The bird-kite fluttered like an impatient eagle. Juan beamed with pride as many people stopped to admire his graceful kite. When they did, Juan would ask, "Would you like to buy a newspaper?"

In no time, Juan had sold the rest of his papers. He carefully put his money safely in a pocket, then untied his kite from the fence, and ran to join the other kite displayers. "We've finished our work, kite," Juan called to the magical bird gliding in the breeze as it hung over his shoulder. "Now, let's go and play!"

Adapted with permission from "Juan" in *What a Child Can Do*, Ottawa: Canadian Red Cross Society, 1986.

HOW HEAVY IS LIFE

Characters:

La Gente (Lah HEN-tay):	**The People**
Zancudos (zahn-KOO-dose) Family:	**Mosquito Family**
Mamá (mah-MAH):	**Mother**
Hija 1, Hija 2 (EE-ha):	**Daughter 1 and Daughter 2**
Hijo (HI-yo) (EE-ho):	**Son**

Setting: **In a house, in the street, in a lagoon, and by a latrine in Talanga (Tah-LAHN-gah), a small town in Honduras. One afternoon.**

Mamá: (Buzzing softly at her work.) ZZZZ ZZ zzzzz ZZ zzZZZZZZ!

Hija 1: (Running around and screaming hysterically.) *Mamá! Mamá! La Gente de Talanga* (lah-HEN-tay day-Tah-LAHN-gah) want to kill me!

Mamá: Hide yourself, my dear! Quick! ZZZZZzzzzz. Keep quiet.

La Gente: (Entering and angrily waving a huge fly swatter.) Where are those mosquitos? I'm going to kill them. They've caused me plenty of sickness. Where are they? (Paces about angrily.) I'm really mad! (Shaking fist.) I'll use something else. (Walks away muttering to himself.)

Hija 1: *La Gente* will come back. *Mamá,* I'm afraid!

Mamá: I know. Let's hurry to the street. There's lots of dirty water there. It's a perfect place. (They go to the street and find other mosquitos already there.)

Hija 2, Hijo: *Hola* (0H-lah), *Mamá*!

Mamá: *Hola,* my children.

Hija 1: I just love Talanga. There's so much dirty water that we can live here safely.

Mamá: Talanga <u>is</u> a paradise for us.

Hija 2: Nobody bothers us. We have security. We have peace.

Hijo: There's plenty of stagnant water. I like it here. I'm very *contento* (cone-TEN-to).

Hija 1: (Nervously.) Mamá! *La Gente de Talanga*! The bad, bad *Gente de Talanga*!

Mamá: Keep calm. We are safe here.

Hija 2: No, look Mamá! *La Gente* are cleaning the street! (Hija leaves and the others follow looking back fearfully.)

La Gente: (To the audience.) Aha! The streets are clean! No more *zancudos*. Tranquility!

Mamá: (Heading toward the lagoon with the others.) Let's get out of here! If we don't, we're going to die! Let's go to the lagoon. I want to see my nymphs.

Hija 1: Stagnant water! How beautiful!

Hija 2: (Looks at the nymphs with wonder.) Mamá? What are those?

Hijo: (In a know-it-all voice) Nymphs... Don't you know anything? (Proudly.) First come eggs, then nymphs, and finally mosquitos.

Hija 2: (Doubtfully.) Is that true, Mamá?

Mamá: (Tenderly and proudly.) Yes, little one. It's true. We are special. We aren't like cows, dogs, or cats that have little babies, nor like the birds who have their babies in eggs. Not us! We use metamorphosis.

La Gente: (Enters carrying a can of kerosene and grinning with satisfaction as he looks around.) HMMMM! (Abruptly turns.) What is that? What do I hear? (Disgustedly.) The sound of the *zancudo*? (Looks around for the source of the sound.) Aha! They're in the stagnant waters of the lagoon! They are my enemies. They cause malaria. I'm going to kill them once and for all! (To the audience.) SHHHH! I have kerosene. I'm going to terminate them! (With more and more feeling.) I'm going to eliminate them! (Points to kerosene.) With this stuff the nymphs can't breathe. *Adios* (ah-dee-OSE)! (Rubs several itchy spots and sighs.) *Adios*, itching! We're going to have peace!

Hijo: (With great feeling.) Quick! Quick! Let's get to the outhouse! *La Gente* is coming! (All scurry quickly and nervously to the outhouse.)

Mamá: My *nimfas* (NIM-fahs)! (Weeping and wailing.) They're all going to die! Woe is me! They can't breathe! (Follows the others out weeping wildly.)

Hija 2: (At the outhouse.) Those horrible *Gente de Talanga*! They put a top on this privy. Now we can't get in. (Very upset.) I have no home! I'm going to die! Mamáááááááá!!!! (Falls to the ground.) Mamáááááááááá!!! (Fades away and dies.)

Mamá: (Searching around and finding a small entrance.) At last! A place! A very small hole to enter. ZZZzzzzzzz (Softly and happily.) ZZZzzzZZZz.

La Gente: (Pours kerosene on the stagnant lagoon.) Liberty! Peace! Health! I'm the victor!! I'm going home. (Walks to chair outside the house, sits back with arms crossed and eyes closed.) Ahhh! What a marvelous day! What a precious (sings) day-oh... (Sits up quickly.) No! Not another *zancudo*! But where? (Walks around listening.) *La letrina* (lah-lay-TREE-nah)!! (To audience.) I have a surprise for them! (Slowly and deliberately fetches a bag of lime.) Aha! (Shakes some of the lime into the latrine.)

Mamá: (Dramatically choking.) Argh!! Argh!! Ahh! Lime! I'm *muriennnnnn* (MOO-ree-en)...

La Gente: Triumphant at last! And now for a nap. (Sits down.)

Hija 1: (Whining.) I'm hungry. All day long I've been fleeing from *La Gente de Talanga*. I'm hungry. I'm going to the house again. There's always blood there at night.

Hijo: (Shaking head seriously.) I have my doubts about that place.

Hija 1: I do, too. But I know the little corners. C'mon! It's worth the risk! (Both head for the house.)

Hijo: (Enraged.) What's this? We can't get into our own house? What terrible luck!!!

Hija 1: *Sí* (see)! There are screens on the doors -- and on all the windows! How terrible these people are! (Angrily.) ZZZZZZzzzzZZZZZ!

Hijo: Shhh! *La Gente* comes. (Softly.) Let's follow him! Shhh!

La Gente: Life is so beautiful without *zancudos*!

Hija 1: (Whining.) I'm hungry. Really hungry!

Hijo: Stupid! Wait.

Hija 1: I'm going to suck some blood. (She pinches *La Gente* who grabs his fly swatter. The two mosquitos hide.)

La Gente: (Rubbing the bite and sighing.) Lucky for me I took my malaria pills. I'm ready. (Takes out bug spray and sprays mosquitos.) I prefer not to use this, but you forced me.

Hija 1: I can't move! I don't want to die! I don't want to... I don't... (Crumbles to the floor.)

Hijo: (Slowly leaves.) Oh, no! I have no future! The streets are clean and dry. The stagnant water of the lagoon is covered with kerosene. The latrines are covered. The house has screens. How are we going to live? What are we going to do? I've bitten my last bite. I've sipped my last blood... (Falls to the ground.)

La Gente: (To the audience.) It was a hard fight, but we won. (Raises hands and shouts.) Long live the people! *Por siempre viva la Gente* (poor see-M-pray VEE-vah-lah-HEN-tay)!

This play was written and submitted by Betty J. Rosentrater, former teacher and former Peace Corps Volunteer, Talanga, Honduras.

TROPICAL RAIN FORESTS

1. What does a tropical rain forest look like?

_____

_____

2. Where can you see one today?

_____

_____

3. Why are tropical rain forests special?

_____

_____

Picture from The Rain Forest and Its Future, World Wildlife Fund.[28]

JUNGLE IN THE HOUSE

FOOD

Fruits and Vegetables

_____banana
_____grapefruit
_____lemon
_____lime
_____orange
_____pepper
_____pineapple
_____potato
_____sweet potato
_____tangerine
_____tomato

Spices and Flavors

_____black pepper
_____chili pepper
_____chocolate or cocoa
_____cinnamon
_____ginger
_____vanilla
_____palm oil (baked goodies)

Other Foods

_____cashew nuts
_____chicle (chewing gum)
_____coconuts
_____coffee
_____cola
_____peanuts
_____sugar
_____tea

AROUND THE HOUSE

Woods and Fibers

_____balsa (kites, model airplanes)
_____mahogany
_____rosewood (instruments)
_____teak
_____bamboo
_____jute (rope, twine, burlap)
_____ramie (cloth)
_____rattan (wicker, chair seats)
_____rubber (balloons, erasers, balls, shoes, tires)

Plants

_____African violet
_____begonia
_____poinsettia
_____rubber plant
_____snake plant

Other Things I Found

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Adapted with permission from "Jungle in the Pantry," from the National Wildlife Federation's "Rain Forests: Tropical Treasures" issue of *NatureScope*.

GRADES 6-9
INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

THEME: PLACE

1. Where Do People Live? (pp.)

Background Information:

Honduras is a country dominated by mountains. Mountains affect the type of climate, resources, and vegetation one finds. Mountains also affect the country's economic development by inhibiting the construction of roads, railways, and telephone lines. How have the physical conditions of Honduras affected its settlement patterns?

Activity Ideas:

- Have students review factors contributing to where people live by studying thematic maps (topography, precipitation, natural resources, population distribution) of your state or of the United States. Ask them to summarize: Where do people in __ live ? Why? Were people living in the same places fifty years ago? Would you expect population to be distributed in the same way in the future? Why or why not? What factors affect where people live?

- Distribute copies of Maps A and B to pairs of students. Ask students to describe the purpose of each map. Ask them to predict where most people in Honduras live based on these maps. Encourage students to share their predictions as well as the reasoning that led them to their predictions. Distribute copies of Map E. Ask students to compare their predictions with the distribution pattern on the map. Discuss some or all of these questions: Are there any surprises? Based on these maps, what factors seem to contribute to where people in Honduras live today? What other factors might contribute (climate, tradition, history, for example)? Would you expect this pattern of population distribution to be the same in the future? Why or why not?

- Have students interview their parents and grandparents to find out why they settled in your area. Compare and contrast the responses of the older and younger generations. What patterns emerge in the class?

- Compare and contrast the settlement patterns of Honduras with those of the United States or your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country. What factors have the greatest influence on where people live? What factors have the least effect?

- Have students locate or make maps of your Volunteer's host country which show topography, vegetation, natural resources, climate, and/or population distribution. Ask the same kind of questions as above. Ask your Volunteer about the role of tradition and technology in determining where people in his or her host country live. Compare and contrast your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country with Honduras.

2. *Nuestro Pais*: Our Country (pp.)

Background Information:

This overview of the geography of Honduras is from the third grade social studies textbook <u>Nuestro Pais</u> which is used by Honduran students in both public and private schools. (Because of their cost and because all students must buy their own materials, textbooks are not usually available in rural schools.)

Activity Ideas:

- Have students silently read the overview in *Nuestro Pais: Our Country* looking for the most important point about Honduras's geography. Compare responses, asking students to give evidence for their choices. As students read the rest of the selection, ask them to look for the influence of the mountains on climate, vegetation, and lifestyle. Alternatively, divide students into groups of four and have each student in the group read and summarize a different section of *Nuestro Pais*. Share the summaries within the groups, again noting the influence of Honduras's mountains on its climate, vegetation, and lifestyles.

- Use a physical map of the United States or the world to locate states and/or countries with physical features similar to those of Honduras. Would the climate and lifestyle (food, clothing, leisure activities, livelihoods, etc.) of those areas be the same as that of Honduras? Why or why not? Have students locate and research the lifestyles of people living in various mountain regions around the world. Create a class bulletin board of students' findings; have students generalize about the characteristics these regions share.

- Have students work in groups to research the climate, resources, and cultures of cities in the United States that are at the same altitude as Tegucigalpa.

- As a math activity, have students work in pairs to convert the metric measurements in *Nuestro Pais* to the English measurements commonly used in the United States. (To convert from degrees Celsius to degrees Fahrenheit, multiply by 9, divide by 5, and then add 32 [C° x 9/5 + 32 = F°]. To convert meters to feet, multiply by 3.93 [1m = 3.93 feet]).

- Have students research the physical geography (landforms, climate, resources) of your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country. What are its most dominant physical features? Research the way these features have influenced climate, economic development, and lifestyle.

- Ask your Peace Corps Volunteer to describe the influence the physical features of his region has had on the people of his or her village or town.

3. **What Makes Honduras Special? (pp.)**

Background Information:

The essays in the first part of this section were written by the students in Peace Corps Volunteer John Kunis's secondary English class. The second group were written by Volunteer's currently serving in Honduras.

Activity Ideas:

- Have students write letters to your Peace Corps Volunteer which respond to the question "What makes (choose one) your state, your city, or the United States special?" After the letters have been written, divide students into groups of five. Ask them to read their letters to the people in their group who will make a list of "Special Aspects of ___." Discuss: How might someone from another town or state respond to "What makes your town (or state or country) special?" Someone from another country? Why?

- Distribute copies of the Honduran students' letters to each group. Ask the group to read the letters aloud to one another, listening for "Special Aspects of Honduras." How are their comments similar to those of the Honduran students and Peace Corps Volunteers? Different? Why? Were there any surprises? Compare the Honduran students' responses with those of the Volunteers.

- Ask students to research your Volunteer's country. Discuss: How might students in your Peace Corps Volunteer's country respond to "What Makes Your Country Special?" Send the class's ideas to your Volunteer. Ask for his or her response to the question.

THEME: RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN PLACES

1. **A Rough Experience (pp.)**

Background Information for Teachers:

According to the World Wildlife Federation, "Two hundred years ago, an almost unbroken green belt of tropical rain forests circled the globe encompassing Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Indonesia. The forests, found around the equator between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, covered approximately 20 percent of the earth's land surface. Today . . . only seven percent remains."

Like many countries in the tropical zone, Honduras is losing its rain forest at an alarming rate. The reasons for deforestation are complex and related to the practice of slash-and-burn agriculture, to the increase in lowland grazing, and to the use of arable land for cash crops. Honduras has not been oblivious to its environmental problems. In efforts to deal with these problems, local citizens and Peace Corps Volunteers have developed many successful programs in areas such as environmental education, hillside agriculture, and protected land management.

Peace Corps Volunteer Kelly Brough, an environmental education specialist in the San Pedro Sula region, was particularly struck by the beauty and fragility of one such protected area -- the tropical rain forest. Kelly penned these impressions for her family and colleagues in her unique "tale with a twist" -- "A Rough Experience." (This version is an adaptation of the piece which appeared in Allí No Mas, the newsletter of the Peace Corps Volunteers of Honduras.) Kelly's story is an enjoyable way to begin a class study of the culture and geography of rain forest areas around the world.

Activity Ideas:

- Ask students to respond in writing to one or both of these questions: What is a rain forest? What does a rain forest have to do with me?

- Read aloud "A Rough Experience." (Suggestion: Set the tone by dimming the lights and playing a tape of forest sounds. Have students close their eyes and relax as you read the story aloud.)

- Distribute copies of the story. Have students re-read the story, using context clues to determine the meaning of the following words: adaptation, canopy, ecosystem, leach, transpiration. Also give students time to modify their original responses to the questions asked above. Use the question "What does a rain forest have to do with me?" as a focus for individual or group research.

- Have students research the location and problems of rain forests in the United States. Compare the problems of deforestation in U.S. rain forests, with the problems of deforestation in Honduras or your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country.

- Ask your Peace Corps Volunteer to describe the problems associated with protected areas (such as tropical rain forests) and deforestation in his or her host country. What are local individuals or Peace Corps Volunteers doing to solve these problems?

2. Think Globally (pp.)

Background Information:

Judy Braus in Environmental Education: Making a Difference (Peace Corps of the United States, Washington, D.C., 1992) states:

> *In the next year . . . more than 42 million tons of sulfur and nitrogen will be released into the atmosphere; more than 2 billion people will not have access to clean water or sanitation services; soil productivity will decrease dramatically; and more than 6000 species of plants and animals will become extinct. In addition, more than 96 million people -- the equivalent of Mexico's current population -- will be added to the 5.3 billion people that already live on earth.*
>
> *The consequences of environmental degradation are inescapable . . . but environmental awareness around the world is increasing and more people are taking personal and community action to reverse this trend.*

Peace Corps has been actively involved in environmental education since the first Volunteers traveled overseas in the early 60s. Many countries have asked for skilled Peace Corps Volunteers to help them design effective environmental education programs including projects which focus on curriculum development, teacher training, materials development, community outreach, youth development, and citizen action. For more than 30 years, Volunteers working in schools, parks, local government, non-governmental organizations, outdoor education centers, extension offices, and tree nurseries have been helping people to become aware of environmental issues and to take action to improve environmental quality.

Because of the critical need for environmental awareness and knowledge, environmental education has been incorporated into almost all areas of Peace Corps programming in Honduras: agriculture, education, natural resources, animal production and water sanitation. Specific projects include development of school curricula and teacher training programs, the establishment and maintenance of protected land areas, and a country-wide multimedia campaign.

The following activity introduces students to media coverage of the environment, and serves as a springboard to research on an environmental issue in your community or your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country. It has been adapted with permission of the National Wildlife Federation from "Identifying Issues" in The Class Project. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under grant No. SED 79-19015.

Activity Ideas:

- On the board, have your class list all of the environmental problems that they can think of. Have students work in small groups to rank the problems in order of their importance. Compare lists, asking students to explain how they came to their decisions. Save the lists for future discussion.

- Over a one to two week period, have teams of students gather information about environmental issues by listening to local and national new broadcasts, and by collecting articles from newspapers and news magazines. Each group should keep a daily record of news reports and articles. Suggestions: Have students either record the title or topic of each news story and article on an index card, or make group folders or scrapbooks of articles that have been collected.

- Ask teams to sort the information they've gathered into categories of environmental issues (e.g., waste management, deforestation, and pollution). As a class, make a list of the issues that appeared in the news, then rank them in order of how often they were mentioned. Discuss: Which issues appeared most often? Why? How does this list compare with the students' original lists of the problems that were important to the world? What is the role of the media in shaping perceptions of environmental problems?

- Have students select two articles with opposing points of view on the same topic. Discuss: How are the articles similar? Different? Which articles/new stories reported the problem as primarily an economic issue? A political issue? A social issue? How might the facts reported about the issue be influenced by one's position on the issue? Why? Have each team choose a different topic, then analyze the points of view represented in the various articles they collected. Discuss: With which position do you most strongly agree? Most strongly disagree? Why? How would you determine whether the information in an article is accurate?

- Have teams of students choose the issue they feel most strongly about from the class's original lists. Have students work with the science teacher, school librarian, and individuals from the community to research and respond to "What does this issue have to do with me or my town?" Present the teams' findings in a series of articles to the school or local newspaper.

- Form an environmental action club in your school. Guide students in conducting a needs assessment of your community, and in choosing a focus issue. Bring in speakers who can present different sides of the issue, as well as different avenues for action. Have the group choose an option and develop a plan of action. Encourage students to use local media to their advantage.

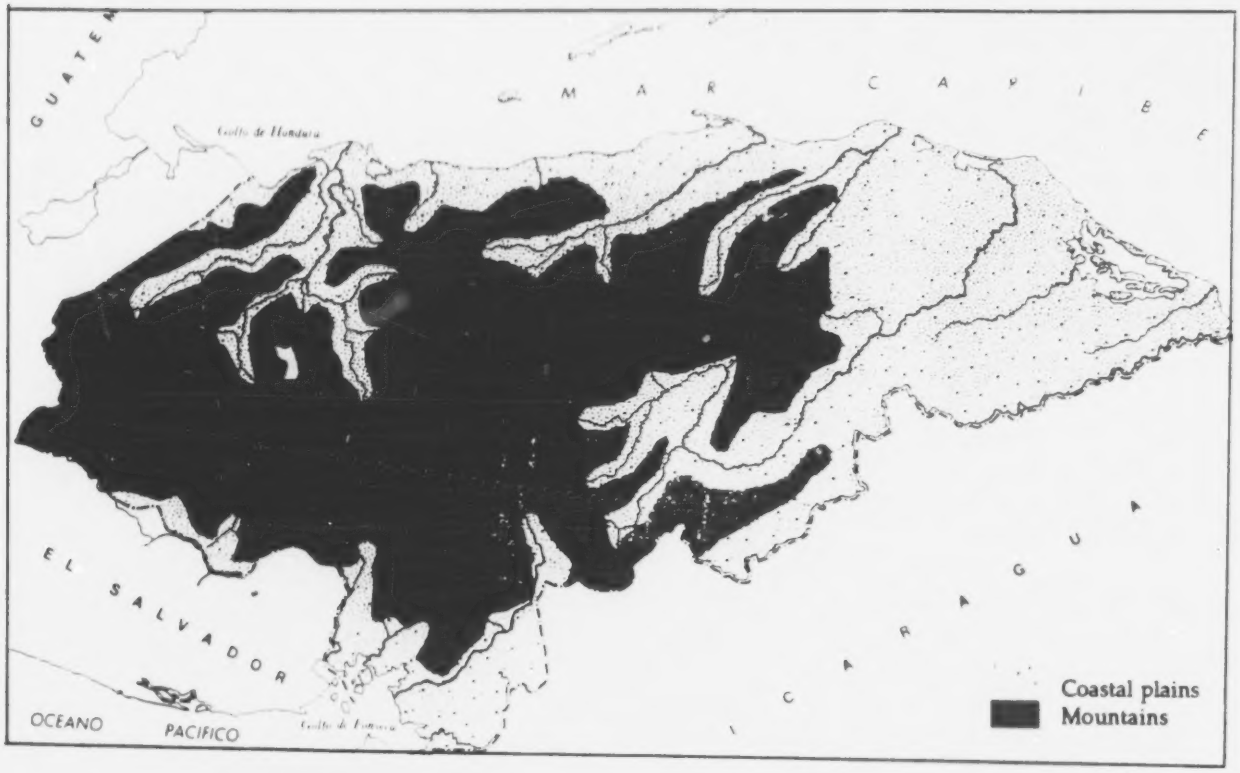
- Ask your Peace Corps Volunteer to describe the environmental issues in his or her host country. How are people in the community trying to solve their environmental problems? What can we in the United States learn from them? How are the environmental problems in your Volunteer's host country related to environmental or economic issues in the United States?

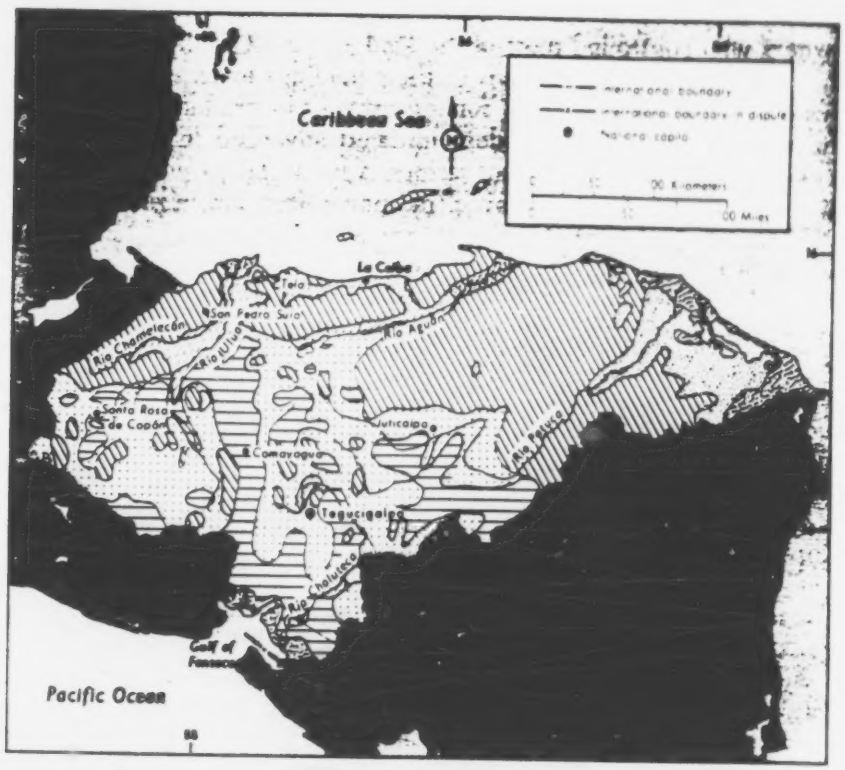
3. **Topics for Further Research**

How Thematic Maps Are Made
Population Migration and Distribution
Contour Maps
Climate and Culture
Gifts from Tropical Rain Forests
The Causes and Effects of Deforestation
Bananas

WHERE DO PEOPLE LIVE?

Map A


M A R C A R I B E
Golfo de Honduras
G U A T E M A L A
E L S A L V A D O R
N I C A R A G U A
OCEANO PACIFICO
Golfo de Fonseca
Coastal plains
Mountains



Map B

Worksheets

41

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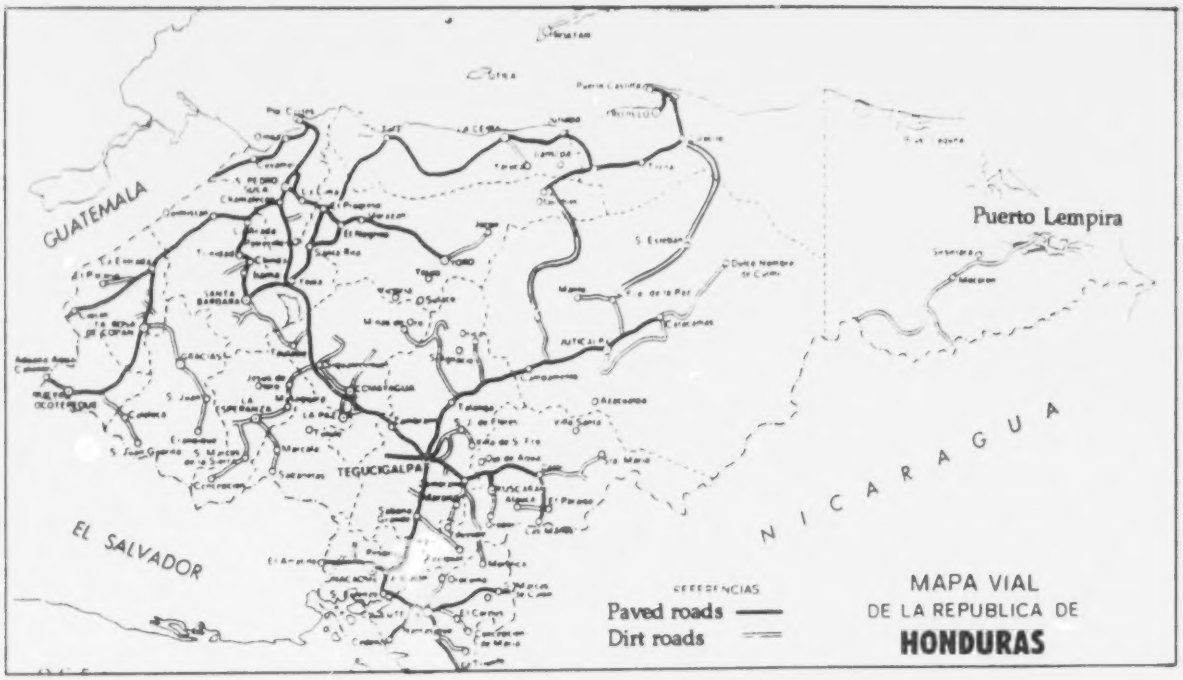
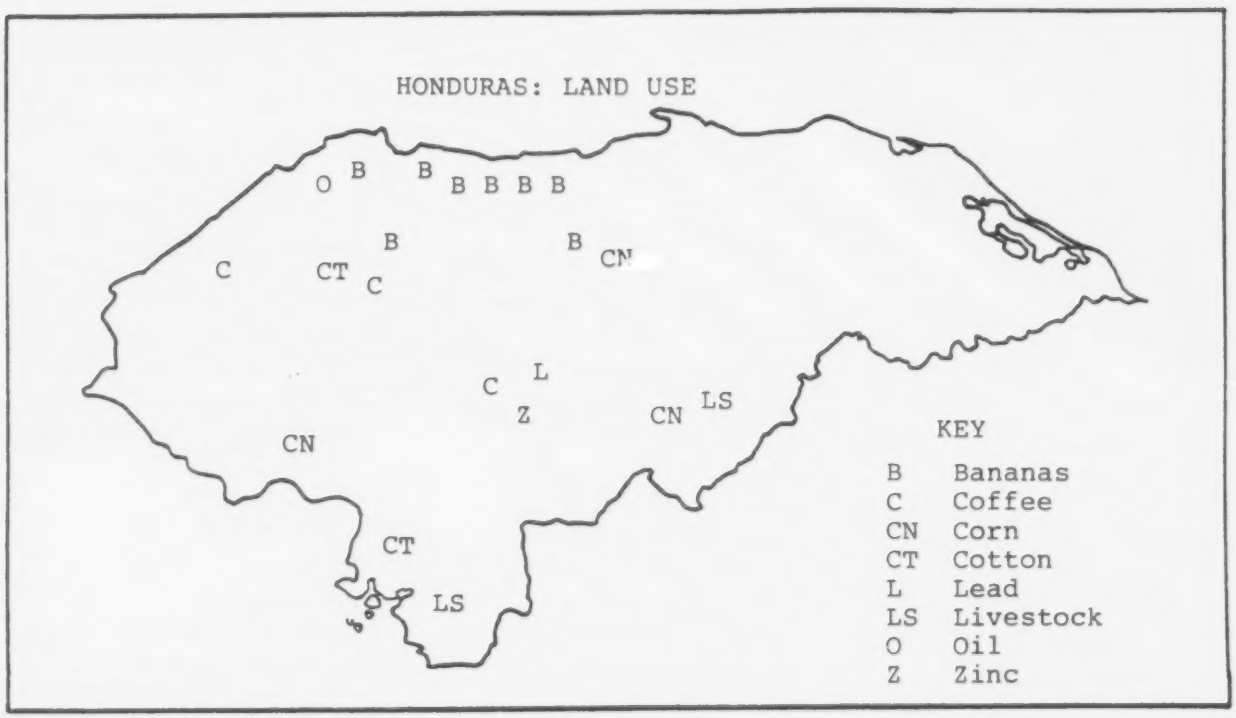
Map C



Map D



Sources: (Maps A,C,D) *Nuestro Pais*, M. Navarro, Tegucigalpa, Honduras: Publicaciones Navarro, 1992; (Maps B,D) *Honduras: A Country Study*, J.D. Rudolph, editor, Washington, D.C.: Dept. of the Army, 1984; (Map E) *Families of the World: Family Life at the Close of the Twentieth Century (Volume I: The Americas and the Caribbean)*, H. Tremblay, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1987. Used with permission.

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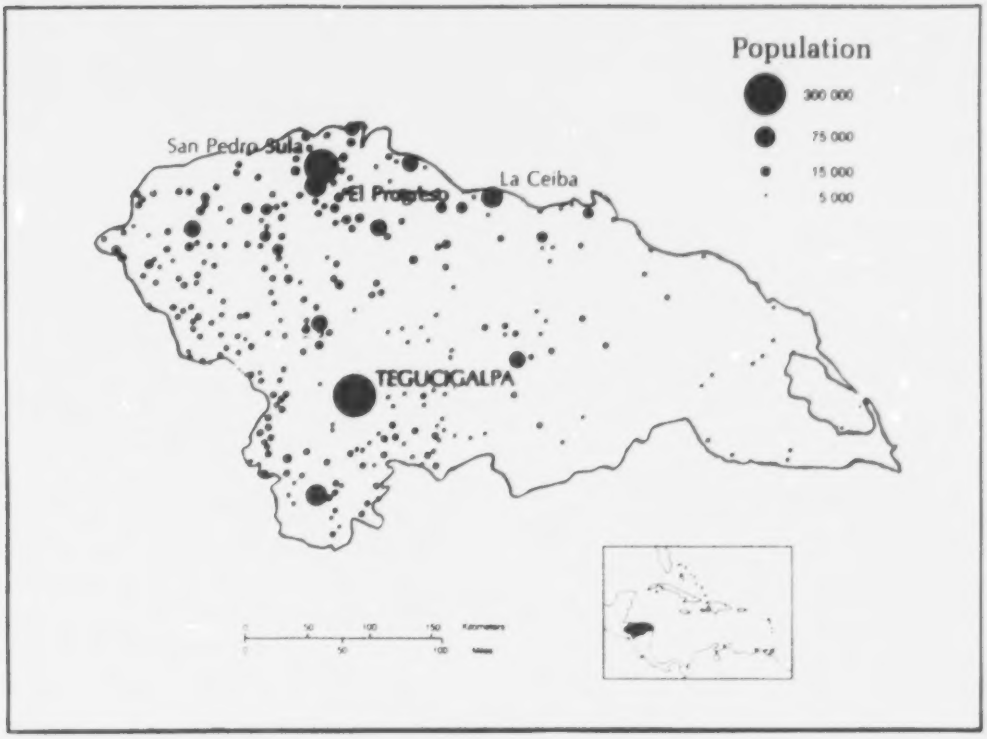
Map E



PRACTICE USING SPECIAL PURPOSE MAPS

Directions: Use the special purpose maps of Honduras to complete this exercise. Record your responses on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Give each map a title which states its special purpose.

2. Tell which map(s) you would use to answer each question, then give your response.
   a. Is it possible to drive from the capital city to Puerto Lempira?
   b. Does Honduras have a Pacific port?
   c. What conditions are best for grazing cattle?
   d. If you lived in Comayagua, would you be able to see banana plantations from your house?
   e. Do most Hondurans live in the mountains?

3. Why are there so few roads in the eastern part of Honduras?

4. In which part of Honduras would you be likely to see rain forest?

5. Where do most of the people in Honduras live? Why?

NUESTRO PAIS: OUR COUNTRY

OVERVIEW

Most of Honduras's land consists of mountains and hills. Honduras is the most mountainous country of Central America, and one of the most mountainous countries of the world. Its only flatlands are the narrow coastal plains that border the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Fonseca, and some small valleys found in the center of the country.

Honduras's coastal plains are narrow, especially along the Gulf of Fonseca. The Caribbean plain widens toward the east, where it broadens and forms the territory called *La Mosquitia.*

The coastal plains are interrupted by hills. Irrigated by streams that run from neighboring mountains, they are covered by thick forests of such precious woods as mahogany and cedar. Although the land is very fertile, it is also marshy and unhealthy.

The Caribbean plain stretches into the interior of the country joining the valleys of the Chamelecon, the Ulua, the Aguan, and the Patuca Rivers. Forests grow in the foothills in areas up to approximately 1000 meters above sea level.

Numerous mountain ranges run through Honduras in all directions making it difficult to clearly describe their courses.

To get a better idea of how uneven the surface of Honduras looks, take a sheet of paper and crumple it in your hands. Open it up and place it on your table without smoothing it very much. This wrinkled sheet of paper could well represent the rough terrain of our country.

MOUNTAINS

Mountains are large elevations of land generally covered with vegetation. Although occasionally found alone, they are usually found in groups or ranges.

Mountains are very useful in the *Zona Torrida* (Torrid Zone) because their height modifies the harshness of the climate. Mountains provide us with many resources including wood and minerals such as gold and silver.

The mountains of Honduras can be divided into two large groups: one eastern and the other western. The western mountain ranges are connected to those of Guatemala, and the Eastern ones are connected to those of Nicaragua.

The eastern and the western mountains are separated by a wide depression that extends from the Caribbean Sea to the Gulf of Fonseca and includes the Sula, Comayagua, and Goascoran valleys.

CLIMATE

Honduras lies in the low latitude area known as the tropics. Because this part of the earth receives the sun's most direct rays all year long, it is one of the hottest parts of the world. Honduras's climate is both hot and humid.

Unlike the countries which are north and south of the tropics, low latitude countries have only two seasons: rainy and dry. Tropical countries with low elevations are hot all year round.

Honduras has one of the most agreeable climates of all the countries within the tropics because of its mountains, nearness to the sea, and the presence of trade winds.

Mountains relieve the harshness of tropical climates because the higher the location, the cooler the area's temperature. In cities located at 1000 or more meters above sea level (La Esperanza, Santa Rosa de Copán, Siguatepeque, and Tegucigalpa, for example), the temperature is pleasantly mild.

On the other hand, places situated on the wide coastal plains and in the lowest valleys of Honduras, are uncomfortably hot almost all year round. The cities of San Pedro Sula, El Progreso, Olanchito, Choluteca, and Nacaome are notorious for their extremely hot climates.

The sea also influences the climate of nearby lands. These areas are said to have a maritime climate. Because no point in Honduras is very far from the sea, the moderating influence of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans is felt in the whole country. Naturally, the sea is most influential in the coastal regions, where breezes constantly cool the temperature.

Another important influence on Honduras's climate are the trade winds which blow across Honduras from the north and south. Trade winds blow all year in low latitude areas. They are usually cool and wet.

DIVERSE CLIMATES

Honduras's differing altitudes lead to three distinct climate regions:

1. *La tierra caliente* (hot lands) are the lands that rise from 0 to 800 meters above sea level. The median temperature in these areas varies from 22 to 28 degrees centigrade with daytime temperatures between 36 and 37 degrees during April and May (right before the rains).
2. *La tierra templada* (temperate lands) are between 800 and 1600 meters in elevation and have a median temperature of between 16 and 22 degrees centigrade. In the capital of the republic, situated at 1000 meters above sea level, the median annual temperature is 21 degrees centigrade, reaching maximums of 33.5 degrees centigrade in April and May and minimums of 10 degrees centigrade in January.
3. *La tierra fria* (cold lands) are lands at elevations above 1600 meters. Only one major Honduran city -- La Esperanza -- is located in the cold lands. In this region, fruits such as peaches, apples, and pears are grown.

Honduras has only two seasons: the rainy season (winter) and the dry season (summer). These two seasons do not occur at the same time throughout the whole country. In the mountains and in the wide coastal plains of the Pacific, the rainy season begins in May and continues until October, with small interruptions in July and August.

As soon as the first rains of May fall, the countryside is rejuvenated, the pastures grow and the *campesinos* (small farmers) begin planting. It is as if nature has just awakened from a deep sleep.

REGIONS

The way the people of Honduras live and the ways in which they earn their living depend on the geographic features of their area.

All countries have places which share similar characteristics: they have the same climate, are equally mountainous or flat, have the same resources, the same plants and animals, or the people have similar customs and occupations. A group of similar adjoining areas makes up a region.

Honduras's mountains allow us to divide the country into three regions or zones, each with its own distinct features.

If all of Honduras was made up of plains, or if it was nothing more than low mountain ranges, the climate of the entire country would be like that of the Mosquito Coast. But Honduras is more than just plains. Honduras can be divided into three zones or natural regions: (1) the Caribbean Region, (2) the Central Region, and (3) the Pacific Region.

The Caribbean Region includes the Caribbean coastal plain and the lowest parts of the mountain ranges that border the Caribbean Sea.

This region experiences all of the harshness of a typical tropical climate: the temperature is extremely hot, it rains most of the year, and the humidity is excessive. Lush forests cover the land, except in places where man has cleared them to plant crops.

The climate in this region is suitable for growing bananas, sugar cane, and tropical fruits. Logging of precious trees such as cedar and mahogany has been one of this region's most important economic activities.

Because of the prosperity brought by the banana and cattle industries, several important cities are located in this region: San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba, Puerto Cortés, Tela, El Progreso, and Olanchito.

Most Hondurans live in the Central Region because of its good climate. Pine trees in this area provide wood and turpentine. The most important crops here are grains, coffee, and potatoes.

Farmers face many obstacles in Honduras's Central Region. There is very little arable land, the dry season is long and hard, and the roughness of the land makes mechanization and the construction of roads difficult.

In contrast to the Central Region, the Pacific Region is extremely hot, and slightly less humid than the flat northern zone. It rains from May to October and the dry season is hard. There is good land for raising cattle, and for cultivating cotton and sugar cane.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What is the most important thing to know about Honduras's geography? Why? How did you decide that?

2. Give at least three examples of diversity in Honduras's geography or culture.

3. How has Honduras's location and physical features affected its climate?

4. Give at least three examples of how the geography of Honduras has influenced the lifestyles or livelihoods of its people.

5. In which region of Honduras would you rather live: the Caribbean, the Central Region, or the Pacific? Why?

6. Is the geography of Honduras more similar to the geography of your state or to the geography of your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country? How?

Adapted from *Nuestro Pais: Estudios Sociales*, M. Navarro, Tegucigalpa, Honduras: Publicaciones Navarro, 1992. Translated by R. Lemberg and P. Baide. Used with permission.

WHAT MAKES HONDURAS SPECIAL?

The following essays were written by English students at St. John's Secondary School, Puerto Cortes, Honduras, and by Peace Corps Volunteers currently serving in Honduras. Please note that all letters have been edited for clarity.

STUDENT RESPONSES

Honduras is special because of its beautiful beaches, and the high and natural mountains where you can go camping. Deep and clean rivers cross the inner part of the country. It has ancient Mayan ruins that shape part of our culture. We have many good country restaurants in our capital.

- Doris Recarte

Honduras may lack the many technological, political and social advantages that other countries have, but it sure has people. Like many undeveloped Central American countries, Honduras does not have an acceptable social order. Only those in the middle and upper classes reach a successful life style; however, those in the lower class enjoy a simple life. They make the best out of what they have and go on trying to improve their social status. The political leaders that the country has are not the best in the area, but some improvement is noticeable. The country has a lot of modern technology, but this does not contribute to its development since it is almost all foreign. Honduras has many problems, but its people enjoy the country's natural beauty (which most countries are losing); that gives it an air of simplicity which makes it unique.

- Edgardo E. Paredes M.

Honduras has a lot of things to offer. It is a place that is going through several economic and political problems. In spite of this, we try to do our best to grow and become one of the most organized countries in the world. Some Hondurans have to work really hard to survive, but not everyone because we are not perfect and everyone makes mistakes. Our country is provided with many valuable things, but not everyone notices their importance. Still, people and how we treat each other are the most important things, not material things. People are special.

- Wendy Gonzales

These things make Honduras special: the people, the beaches where everybody can have a great time, the mountains where we can go camping and see different kinds of animals, the rivers that flow along the Honduran valley floors, the beautiful wild animals that represent the colors of life, the children of all kinds that show their innocence in their faces and the happiness that surrounds them (because in their lives differences in money do not exist), the language that we speak every day, and the traditional customs we try not to forget.

- Karina Croasdaile

Honduras is special because of its people and its nature: the beaches, the mountains, and the rivers that give Honduras a very beautiful and natural appearance. It's beautiful because of the different kinds of animals. Even though some people do not care about them, they are still in Honduras.

- Medardo R.C.

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER RESPONSES

Geographically, Honduras is extremely unique in that it is not only a tropical country, but also because 80% of its land surface is mountainous. It only has one natural lake. It has been sparsely populated up until this century due to the inaccessibility caused by these mountains. The really special quality of Honduras, however, is not the geography, its pine forests, or its history. In my opinion it is the people. It seems to be a recurring theme among travelers and Peace Corps workers alike that Honduras has some of the most friendly people around. This has been my experience as well. No matter how poor, or, in some cases, busy, a Honduran may be, the majority are willing to talk to you or help you out.

- Torrence David Wilson

Many things make Honduras special, but most special of all are the people who are warm, friendly, courteous, and caring despite many hardships.

Many Hondurans are farmers and many of these farmers are subsistence farmers, (that means they live on what they are able to grow on their small farms which are usually located on steep-sided mountains). Working these farms is labor-intensive and many farmers do not have sufficient income to afford modern farm equipment and materials such as fertilizer. Most of the farms are worked by hand and hoe.

Also, many of the nation's farmers are migratory farmers. When the fertility of the soil that they are presently cultivating is depleted, they move on to another area.

Few farmers have such conveniences as motorized transportation, electricity and running water.

Many children of farming families drop out of school at an early age to help their families with the farming chores.

Yet, despite these hardships, Hondurans are genuinely friendly, courteous, polite, generous, well-mannered, understanding, and always willing to lend a helping hand when it is needed. And they take great pride in their personal appearance.

A truly beautiful people in a somewhat harsh land. . . .

- Anonymous

A ROUGH EXPERIENCE

By Kelly Brough
Peace Corps Volunteer, Honduras

My story is one of survival and of extreme adaptation to living in a tropical forest. It is also a story of clever opportunism.

It all began a long time ago when I took a fall of over 100 feet from the canopy of a tropical rain forest. I fell through a tangle of vines, lianas (lee-AN-as), epiphytes (EP-a-fits), and moss-covered branches to the forest floor. I lay on the damp acidic soil for what seemed like forever. Rain pummeled me and insects crawled over me. Days and nights slowly passed. I was stuck halfway in the leaf litter with little or no sun, with huge, ominous trees towering over me, and with a city of life carrying out its everyday tasks in the canopy far above. No one noticed me or paid me a care.

As one day melted into another I realized that my outer body was decaying -- my protection was being removed by the elements and by the thousands of insects that were visiting me. Leaves, moss, and, occasionally, bromeliads (bro-MEE-lee-ads) fell and began to cover me. I worried about my survival and longed for the sun, even the smallest patch of it.

Then it happened. My survival was guaranteed! The night became stormy and fierce and driving rain whipped at the branches above. Debris fell everywhere and lightening illuminated the heavily laden branches. Suddenly, there was a terrible racket: a loud tearing, like the sound of a limb being torn from its owner's body, rose above the strains of moaning which seemed to come from the others in the area. At first, I didn't realize the significance of the event and its effect on my future. All I knew was that the lightening was brighter and the rain was falling harder.

I must have drifted off during the night, for when I awoke a huge sunbeam surrounded me. It soaked into my inner soul and instantly I felt something different. I knew I had to seize this crucial moment!

A huge gap had been ripped in the canopy by the high winds of the night before. Only one branch had broken off, but with it, many others had fallen. The vines and lianas that had spread through the canopy acting as mini-freeways had also come down clearing an area the size of ten cars. This spot, a light gap, provided me with new life. Instantly, I began to transform. I sent out a tap root and a tiny stem soon followed. Competition was fierce for the limited light. The others around me had had a head start; they were already seedlings with large, thin leaves that could easily intercept available light.

I was lucky enough to receive the strongest, most direct light, and in no time at all had caught up with, and, in some cases, even surpassed my nearest competitors. I sent out thousands of roots that eventually would equal the size of my crown; at this point, however, they were only searching for scarce nutrients. The soil was not very rich: centuries of heavy rain had carried away most of its nutrients, leaving only a thin layer of leaf litter -- decaying organic debris -- to provide nutrition. Because my roots were so shallow, buttresses formed to support my growing trunk and canopy. Silently I hoped that they would not become too grand because their flatness and size would make them attractive to small-scale wood cutters.

Days turned into decades. I stretched for the canopy and gradually became a member of the upper community. How I wanted to belong! Everyone there seemed to have a special role or to be entwined in a bizarre or mysterious relationship. Some flowers only allowed certain insects to pollinate them. They produced special colors or scents to attract particular insects, and grew in strange shapes to repel others.

Once, after a particularly hard week, one of my branches drooped over to a neighbor's branch. I thought nothing of it until my leaves began to die and drop off. The poisons he was emitting had killed my leaves. Chemical warfare! I learned quickly not to get too close.

Epiphytes and bromeliads slowly began to invade my branches and trunk. At first, I was somewhat annoyed. I didn't like being used for physical support while gaining nothing in return. These pests grow all over us trees collecting water in funnel-shaped tanks that can hold up to 12 gallons. Sometimes insects, frogs or salamanders live in them, providing birds or mammals with delectable treats.

In spite of everything, I somehow learned to benefit from these many and varied plants. You see, while they clung to me, they acted as compost piles collecting leaves, twigs and other canopy debris for their nutrients. I eventually learned to send specialized roots into the compost, thus extracting precious extra energy.

After nearly half a century I became an integrated part of the canopy. The light gap closed and my branches became part of the suspended inter-tree highway. Monkeys, tree sloths, jaguars and an incredible variety of colorful birds visited me. Many of these creatures spend their entire lives 150 feet above the ground!

Over the years, my leaves changed a great deal. My lower canopy leaves became tough and glossy to reduce transpiration and to store nutrients from rainwater. My upper canopy leaves thickened to prevent nutrients from leaching away due to continuous exposure to sun and rain.

As I reached my full height, grayish moss covered every available space, giving me a look of maturity. Climbers and vines scaled my trunk, endlessly circling and inter-twining. Lianas -- some more than 300 feet long and as thick as a man's leg -- stretched from branch to branch and from crown to crown.

All in all, life has been good. Seasons have come and gone like animals migrating from one part of the forest to the other in search of fruiting trees and flowers. Humans have wandered by, too, but they've never lingered nor seemed interested.

And now? Not very long ago a new type of epiphyte germinated in my upper branches. I wasn't particularly concerned at the time -- plants always seem to come and go here. All too soon, however, it became apparent that this was no ordinary epiphyte. Its well-anchored roots sent nutrients up to the plant boosting the formation of a crown that eventually stole most of my available sunlight and water.

I've been in this state for sometime now. Eventually I will loose this long and slow battle. I've thought about it a lot and I'm not really sad. I've lived for over a century and have watched new life come out of death. Nothing is wasted in nature, and I will, in my death and decay, provide a temporary niche for a plethora of fungi, insects and animals. In time, I'll be the energy for a beautiful orchid, a liana, or maybe even a seed of my own.

Don't be sad for me, for it is I who am sad for you -- humans. I live in a balanced state, in simple harmony with nature. I've looked far into the distance and have seen the black clouds of your smoke. I've heard not only the song of the wandering solitaire, the hum of thriving insects and the dance of dripping rain, but also the drone of indiscriminate chain saws. Strange, unfamiliar odors have drifted our way and choked our stomas. Humans seem to be happy in their fabricated world, but every year they seem to come closer and closer. I'm not sure of our fate as there seem to be more clouds, more burning rain and more solar radiation. I don't know their over all plan. I just hope that it is in harmony with ours.

THINK GLOBALLY

The following organizations publish extensively about environmental problems, and some have taken stands on different sides of some of these issues. Use this list to gather material about environmental issues and to identify the stands taken by organizations. Keep in mind that most materials do not usually present all sides of an issue.

U.S. Government Agencies

Council on Environmental Quality
722 Jackson Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Environmental Protection Agency
401 M. Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

National Park Service
(Use address for U.S.
Department of Interior)

Office of Public Affairs
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555

Office of Surface Mining
1951 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

U.S. Department of
Agriculture
Forest Service
P.O. Box 96090
Washington, D.C. 20013

U.S. Dept. of the Interior
Interior Building
C St. Between 18th and 19th, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
(Use address for U.S. Department of
Interior)

U.S. Geological Survey
National Center
Reston, Virginia 22092

Environmental Organizations

American Fisheries Society
5410 Grosvenor Lane
Bethesda, Maryland 20814

Concern, Inc.
1794 Columbia Road, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009

Defenders of Wildlife
1244 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Environmental Action Foundation, Inc.
1525 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Environmental Defense Fund, Inc.
257 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10010

Environmental Research
Institute, Box 156
Moose, Wyoming 83012

Friends of Animals, Inc.
11 West 60th Street
New York, New York 10023

Friends of the Earth
218 D Street, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20003

Greenpeace
1436 U Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009

Izaak Walton League of America
1401 Wilson Blvd., Level B
Arlington, Virginia 22209

League of Conservation Voters
1150 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Suite 201
Washington, D.C. 20036

National Audubon Society
950 Third Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

National Wildlife Federation
1400 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Natural Resource Defense Council
40 West 20th Street
New York, New York 10011

Nuclear Information and
Resource Service, Suite 601
1424 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Society for Range Management
1839 York Street
Denver, Colorado 80206

Sport Fishing Institute
1010 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Suite 100
Washington, D.C. 20001

Union of Concerned Scientists
26 Church Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts
02238

United Nations Conference on
Environment and Development
Room S-3060
United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017

Worldwatch Institute
1776 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

For names of additional organizations refer to resources such as the *Conservation Directory* published by the National Wildlife Federation, Washington, D.C.

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GRADES 10-12
INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

THEME: PLACE

1. **Snapshot of Honduras (pp.)**

Background Information:

North Americans often associate Central American countries such as Honduras with one thing -- bananas. Bananas do account for 60% of the value of Honduran exports -- most coming from huge plantations on the north coast owned by American companies. However, Honduras is far from being simply a "banana republic." As your students will see, Honduras, the second largest and most mountainous Central American country, is richly diverse in geography, ecology, and culture.

Activity Ideas:

- Have students write descriptions of your school, state or community based on the definition of place given in the selection "Fundamental Themes of Geography" in "Background Information for Teachers." Include physical features and human characteristics in these descriptions.
- Have students read "Snapshot of Honduras." Individually or in pairs complete "Recalling Information."
- Have students write a brief essay describing Honduras based on the definition of place in "Fundamental Themes of Geography." Use additional resources from your library to complete this activity.
- Have students work cooperatively to develop a bibliography of materials on Honduras (or your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country) that are available in your school or local library. Evaluate reasons for the plenty or paucity of materials on the chosen country.
- Have students work in groups to prepare a summary of information about your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country. Send the piece to your Volunteer for his or her input.

2. **On a Personal Note (pp.)**

Background Information:

Adapting to a new culture is, in many ways, the heart of the Peace Corps Volunteer experience. Recognizing that one can employ various strategies during this period of transition -- strategies such as learning the language, observing behavior, finding a mentor, asking questions, and using trial and error -- makes the process more manageable and helps one prepare for future transitions.

"Dear Future Volunteer," written by Peace Corps Volunteer John Ferguson, is from the invitation booklet prepared by the Peace Corps of the United States for trainees who have been invited to serve in Honduras. "Catacamas Market," by Rebecca Easton, is from Allí No Mas, the newsletter of the Peace Corps Volunteers of Honduras. Both pieces highlight the change in perspective and attitude one experiences as one adapts to the sights, sounds, and the unwritten rules of a new place.

Activity Ideas:

- Locate Catacamas (kah-tah-KAH-mahs), and Tegucigalpa (Tay-goo-see-GAL-pah) on a map of Honduras. Ask students to describe their locations in as many ways as possible.

- For homework on the preceding night, have students write about a time when they were the "new kid on the block." Include: What was most difficult about being new? What was easiest? What strategies (i.e., behaviors) helped you to adapt? What strategies would make it easier for someone to adapt to this school or community? During the next class period, ask students to share their pieces in small groups. Summarize responses to the discussion questions.

- Have students read the two pieces in "On a Personal Note." Discuss: How do you think the Peace Corps Volunteer authors would respond to "What was most difficult about being new?" "What was easiest?" and "What strategies helped you adapt?" Ask students to explain the reasoning behind their responses.

- Ask your Peace Corps Volunteer to share his or her strategies for adapting to life in a new culture. Which of these techniques would help someone coming to the United States?

3. ***A Honduras*: The National Anthem (pp.)**

Background Information:

"A Honduras" ("To Honduras") -- is sung by Honduran students in the closing scenes of the videotape "Destination: Honduras." One former Peace Corps Volunteer noted that a sixth grade graduation requirement for Honduran students is to know all seven verses to the anthem. The anthem is usually referred to as "Tu Bandera" ("Your Flag").

Activity Ideas:

- Ask students to review the words to the "Star Spangled Banner." Ask them to share what they know about the history of this anthem.

- Read aloud the words to "A Honduras." Ask students to compare Honduras's national anthem with that of the United States. Discuss: Whose point of view is represented in the anthems? What is the purpose of a national anthem?

- Have students work in groups to review patriotic songs about the United States ("America the Beautiful," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," etc.) to determine if any of these might be better as our national anthem. After hearing or reading each piece (including the "Star Spangled Banner"), have the class choose an anthem.

- Have students research your state anthem or song. Compare the purpose of a state anthem with the purpose of a national anthem.

- Ask your Peace Corps Volunteer to describe the anthem of his or her host country. Do most people know it? Why or why not?

4. **A Closer Look at Columbus (pp.)**

Background Information:

The position statement on the Columbian Quincentenary developed by the National Council for the Social Studies in October 1991 begins:

> *One of the most significant and visible features of the contemporary United States is its multiethnic and culturally pluralistic character. . . . Another significant feature of the United States is the fact that the nation and its citizens are an integral part of a global society created by forces that began to unfold in 1492. Geographically, the Eastern and Western Hemispheres*

were joined after millennia of virtual isolation from one another. Economically, the growth of the modern global economy was substantially stimulated by the bullion trade linking Latin America, Europe, and Asia; the slave trade connecting Africa, Europe, and the Americas; and the fur trade joining North America, western Europe, and Russia. Politically, the contemporary worldwide international system was born in the extension of intra-European conflict into the Western Hemisphere, the establishment of European colonies in the Americas, and the accompanying intrusion of Europeans into the political affairs of Native Americans, and the Native Americans' influence on the political and military affairs of European states. Ecologically, the massive transcontinental exchange of plants, animals, microorganisms, and natural resources initiated by the Spanish and Portuguese voyages modified the global ecological system forever.

The paper continues with a discussion of the basic knowledge that should be taught about the historical setting and effects of Columbus's voyages:

1. *Columbus did not discover a new world, and, thus, initiate American history. . . .*
2. *The real America Columbus encountered in 1492 was a different place from the precontact America often portrayed in folklore, textbooks, and the mass media. . . .*
3. *Africa was very much a part of the social, economic, and political system of the Eastern Hemisphere in 1492. . . .*
4. *The encounters of Native Americans, Africans, and Europeans following 1492 are not stories of vigorous white actors confronting passive red and black spectators and victims. . . .*
5. *As a result of forces emanating from 1492, Native Americans suffered catastrophic mortality rates. . . .*
6. *Columbus's voyages were not just a European phenomenon but, rather, were a facet of Europe's millennia-long history of interaction with Asia and Africa. . . .*
7. *Although most examinations of the historical connections of the United States to the Eastern Hemisphere tend to focus on northwestern Europe, Spain and Portugal also had extensive effects on the Americas. . . .*

Certain events in human history change forever our conception of who we are and how we see the world. . . . The event of five hundred years ago, when a small group of Europeans and, soon after, Africans, encountered Native Americans is of this magnitude. . . .

"A Closer Look at Columbus" is a translation of material from the Honduran social studies textbook Nuestro Pais (Our Country). Because students must buy their own materials (and books are very expensive), textbooks such as this are not usually found in rural areas.

Activity Ideas:

- As a class, write the story of Christopher Columbus. Record the story on a transparency or on large sheets of paper. Have students work in pairs to respond to the following questions about the account:

  1. What were Columbus's motives? (Think globally as well as personally.)
  2. Is the story told from the point of view of the Europeans or of the indigenous people he encountered? What words or phrases from the story support your opinion?
  3. How are the indigenous people portrayed?
  4. Describe Columbus's personality and values. What words or phrases from the story support your opinion?
  5. What was left out of this account that, if included, would give a more complete understanding of Columbus's voyage and his contact with the Indians of the Caribbean?

- Read "A Closer Look at Columbus." Evaluate the content of the account using the above evaluation questions. Compare the class's version of Columbus with that of *Nuestro Pais*. What can account for the similarities and differences?

- Have students locate the following places on a map of the world: Palos (Spain), Portugal, India, Honduras, Canary Islands, Spice Islands, Hispaniola (La Española), and the Antilles. Use the text to map Columbus's approximate route.

- Have students break up into evaluation teams of four to five students. Using the above questions, have each team evaluate the text and illustrations of three to five accounts of Columbus appearing in one of these categories of books: elementary textbooks, elementary biographies, junior high textbooks, junior high biographies, senior high textbooks, or senior high biographies. Representatives of each team should present their team's conclusions and recommendations during a class forum.

- Have teams or pairs of students rewrite and illustrate the story of Columbus for elementary school students. Share the stories with younger students and with the school librarian. Send a copy to your local newspaper or public library.

- Write to your Peace Corps Volunteer about the portrayal of those who colonized his or her host country. How do these accounts compare with the accounts of Columbus that the class has read?

THEME: RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN PLACES

1. **What's All the Fuss about Land Use? (pp.)**

Background Information for Teachers:

Did you know that it takes approximately one hundred years for nature to create a one-inch layer of topsoil? Unsustainable land use practices such as slash-and-burn agriculture cause erosion that can deplete that layer in a few years.

What is slash-and burn? Slash-and-burn is a method of farming that was once commonly practiced in the United States, and is still practiced in most forested nations of the developing world. As the name implies, it involves, first, "slashing" or cutting a patch of forest, and, second, "burning off" the underbrush to clear a garden plot. Ash from the fire acts as an initial application of fertilizer. When the soil eventually becomes depleted of nutrients (usually after two harvests), the farmer moves to another plot of land and begins the process all over again. The old garden is left to recover its lost fertility, a process that may require more than ten years. Slash-and-burn is also referred to as migratory agriculture.

Slash-and-burn methods of farming were introduced by the Europeans when they came to Honduras.

In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with migratory agriculture. Problems arise, however, when lands are not left fallow long enough to recover their fertility and when the population of an area is so large that farmers run out of suitable land and must farm areas that cannot sustain agriculture -- fragile hillsides, for example. The poorer the land, the poorer the yield -- and the harder the farmer has to work to simply meet his family's basic needs.

"What's All the Fuss about Land Use?" was adapted from a piece by former Peace Corps Volunteer Vince Murphy; it originally appeared in the Peace Corps/Honduras Volunteer newsletter Allí No Mas as "Land Conversion Syndrome: A Downward Spiral."

Activity Ideas:

- If needed, review the meaning of: watershed, fallow, sustainable, migratory, and slash-and-burn.

- Have students read the essay and then respond to "Clarifying What You Have Read."

- Discuss: What is the author's point of view on land use? How would he feel about clearing land for railroad tracks? Designating a region as a national park? Cutting down trees to raise money for health care?

- Working with a partner, illustrate the effect of deforestation on population movement or health. Explain the illustration to other students in the class.

- Have students work with the science teacher or with state forestry officials to learn about the causes and effects of deforestation in your community or state.

- Invite a speaker from your community to tell your class about land use laws in your area.

- As a class, develop a questionnaire for interviewing people in your community about local land use practices and their effects on soil, water, animals, and people. Include people representing different areas of interest (eg., conservation, real estate) in your sample. What conclusions can students make about land use practice and policy in your community?

- As a class, develop a questionnaire for interviewing older people in your community about changes in your local environment during their lifetime. Include such things as changes in the number of people, land use changes, scientific and technological discoveries, and changes in transportation systems. What effect has each of these changes had on soil, water, animals, and people?

- Ask your Peace Corps Volunteer about land use practices and traditions in his or her country. Find out how people are affected by deforestation in their day to day lives. Ask about the role of developed countries in the environmental problems of his or her host country.

2. **Deforestation: A Downward Spiral (pp.)**

Background Information for Teachers:

According to the National Wildlife Federation, sustainable development refers to "development that uses natural resources in an efficient way and without destroying the basis of their productivity. Sustainable development allows natural resources to regenerate. Many indigenous people have practiced sustainable slash-and-burn agriculture in tropical forests for hundreds of years" (From the "Rain Forests: Tropical Treasures" issue of NatureScope).

Sustainable development, however, is not a concept applicable only to Third World countries. Indeed, it refers to a life style that can be embraced by all countries and peoples. The strategy statement generated jointly by The World Conservation Union (IUCN), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), in Caring for the Earth, suggests that sustainable development begins with an ethic:

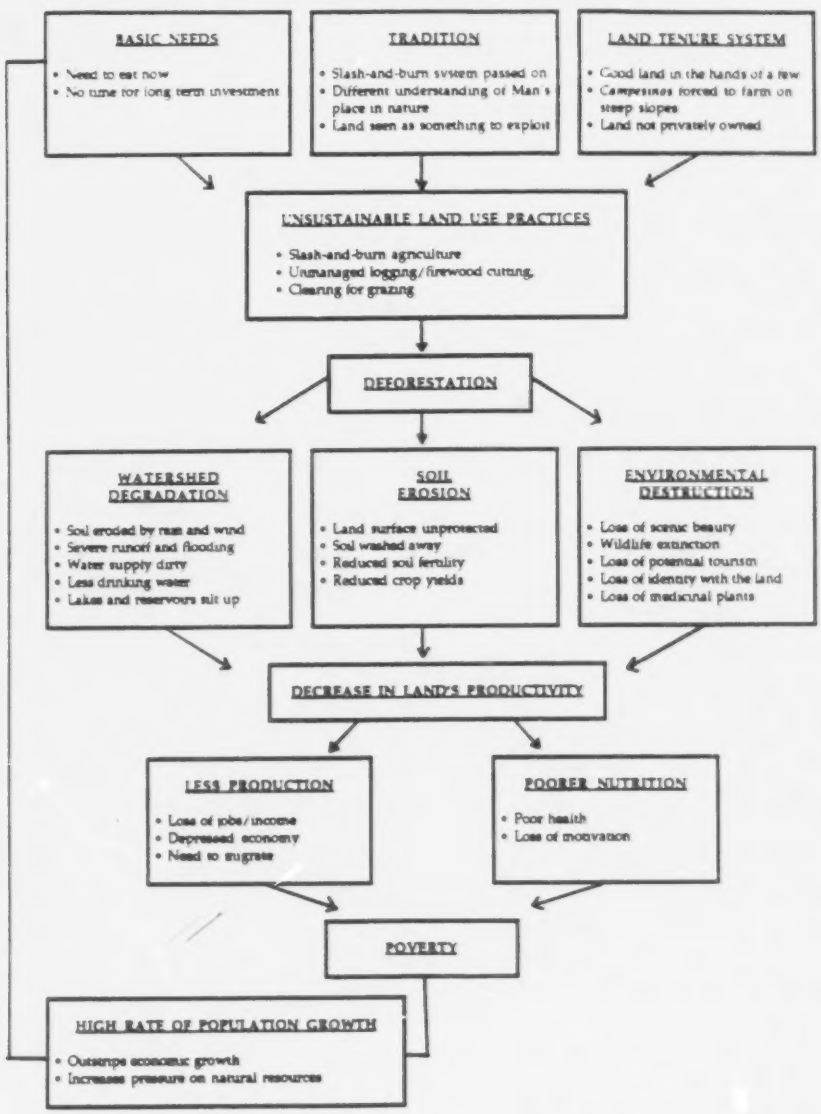
> *The ethic for living sustainably is about each person's responsibility for his or her impact on nature. It is about not taking from nature more than an equitable share of the resources nature can make good. It is about not depleting the gene pool, not wasting the soil, and not undermining the capacity of nature to sustain future generations. . . . We must adopt life styles and development paths that respect and work within nature's limits. We can do this without rejecting the many benefits that modern technology has brought, provided that technology itself works within those limits.*
>
> *. . . The truth is that the move to sustainable living will be easy for nobody -- but that communities have no other long-term choice, so they had best use the breathing space of today to avoid breathlessness tomorrow. (Caring for the Earth: The Way Ahead, Cambridge, England, 1991)*

Former Peace Corps/Honduras Volunteer Vince Murphy illustrates the human and environmental consequences of unsustainable development in the flow chart "Deforestation: A Downward Spiral."

Activity Ideas

- Have students read and discuss "What's All the Fuss about Land Use?" Based on the information in the essay, have students work in pairs to fill in the blanks of the flow chart. Ask students to explain the reasoning behind their choices.
- Have pairs of students transpose the flow chart into another form: verbal or graphic. Have students use their new formats to explain the cycle of unsustainable land use to groups of younger students.
- Working in pairs, have students research the cause and effects of land use practices and deforestation in other countries or regions of the world. Adapt the flow chart so that it reflects circumstances in another part of the world. Compare and contrast the causes and effects of deforestation in different regions.
- Share "Deforestation: A Downward Spiral" with your Peace Corps Volunteer. Ask if it reflects circumstances in his or her community or country. If so, find out what people in his or her country are doing to interrupt the cycle of deforestation/poverty.

DEFORESTATION: A DOWNWARD SPIRAL


BASIC NEEDS
• Need to eat now
• No time for long term investment
TRADITION
• Slash-and-burn system passed on
• Different understanding of Man's place in nature
• Land seen as something to exploit
LAND TENURE SYSTEM
• Good land in the hands of a few
• Campesinos forced to farm on steep slopes
• Land not privately owned
UNSUSTAINABLE LAND USE PRACTICES
• Slash-and-burn agriculture
• Unmanaged logging/firewood cutting
• Clearing for grazing
DEFORESTATION
WATERSHED DEGRADATION
• Soil eroded by rain and wind
• Severe runoff and flooding
• Water supply dirty
• Less drinking water
• Lakes and reservoirs silt up
SOIL EROSION
• Land surface unprotected
• Soil washed away
• Reduced soil fertility
• Reduced crop yields
ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION
• Loss of scenic beauty
• Wildlife extinction
• Loss of potential tourism
• Loss of identity with the land
• Loss of medicinal plants
DECREASE IN LAND'S PRODUCTIVITY
LESS PRODUCTION
• Loss of jobs/income
• Depressed economy
• Need to migrate
POORER NUTRITION
• Poor health
• Loss of motivation
POVERTY
HIGH RATE OF POPULATION GROWTH
• Outstrips economic growth
• Increases pressure on natural resources

SNAPSHOT OF HONDURAS

LOCATION: Honduras is a Central American country located between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean at 14° N and 87° W. It borders Guatemala in the west, El Salvador in the south, and Nicaragua in the east. Its territory includes the Bay Islands which are off the Caribbean coast. The word *honduras* means depths; most people believe that the country was named by Columbus who, on sighting the country's coast after a devastating storm exclaimed, "*Gracias a Dios que hemos salido de estas honduras*" (Thank God we have navigated from these depths).

LAND AREA: Roughly resembling a parallelogram in shape, Honduras covers an area of 43,278 square miles. Approximately the same size as Pennsylvania, its population density of 117 people per square mile is similar to that of Tennessee. Honduras is the second largest of the Central American republics.

TERRAIN: The most outstanding physical feature of Honduras is, without a doubt, its mountains. Although narrow stretches of lowland can be found along the coast and in river valleys, almost 80% of the country's land is at elevations of 3,000 to 9,000 feet. Honduras can be divided into four regions each with distinct characteristics, climate, and culture: (1) the eastern lowlands, (2) the northern coastal plain, (3) the central highlands, and (4) the Pacific lowlands. The capital city, Tegucigalpa (Taa-goo-see-GAL-pa), located at over 3000 feet above sea level, was originally a silver mining center.

CLIMATE: The climate in Honduras varies with an area's physical features and location. Generally, the northern rain forest areas are hot and humid with temperatures ranging from 79° to 82° Fahrenheit, and annual rainfall of 70 to 110 inches. Mountainous areas are cooler (between 58° and 73° Fahrenheit), with generally less rain. May to November is considered the rainy season.

POPULATION: Over 5,138,000 people live in Honduras -- and this number is increasing at a rapid rate. (Between 1950 and 1974 the population of Honduras doubled.) Almost 90% are of mestizo descent, 7% are Native Americans, 2% are of African descent, and 1% is white. Most people live in small towns or villages in the central highlands and make their living farming other people's land.

LANGUAGE: The official language spoken in Honduras is Spanish. However, a large population of Mayan Indians live in the west and speak a language called Chorti. Other local languages are also spoken.

RELIGION: The most predominant religion practiced in Honduras is Roman Catholicism; a significant number of Protestant groups are also represented.

GOVERNMENT: The Honduran government is similar in structure to that of the United States. Honduras is a democracy currently headed by President Rafael

Leonardo Callejas. Under the current constitution, the government is divided into three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. There have been sixteen constitutions since the country became independent in 1821.

ECONOMY: Even though only 20% of the land is suitable for farming, most people in Honduras are subsistence farmers. Bananas (which are grown on plantations set up by U.S. fruit companies) are the main export, although coffee has recently become almost as important in value. Sugar and lumber are also exported.

FLAG: The national flag has three horizontal stripes, two blue and one white. The white center band has five blue stars which represent the five Central American countries with which Honduras was united between 1821 and 1838. Blue symbolizes the hopes and dreams of the Honduran people; white represents peace.

PEACE CORPS: There are currently two hundred sixty Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Honduras. More then 3,000 volunteers have served in Honduras since 1962.

RECALLING INFORMATION

1. Put a check beside the words which accurately describe the location of Honduras:

__ Caribbean	__ Atlantic Ocean
__ South America	__ northern hemisphere
__ Argentina	__ south of the United States
__ Central America	__ northwest of Nicaragua

2. How is Honduras geographically diverse? Is it more or less diverse than your state? than your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country?

3. From the information in this snapshot, list five ways in which Honduras is similar to the United States.

4. Mark an **X** next to the statements that are true:
   __ Honduran society is primarily urban.
   __ Honduras is a landlocked country.
   __ The climate of Honduras is the same from coast to coast.
   __ Most of Honduras is of coastal plain.

5. How does the physical terrain of Honduras affect its climate?

6. What information about Honduras surprised you? Why?

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

The following pieces were written Peace Corps Volunteers during their service in Honduras. What do they say about the process of learning to live in another culture?

Dear Future Volunteer,

My name is John Ferguson and I am currently living in a remote part of western Honduras working as a crop extensionist. . . . It takes two days of travelling from the Peace Corps office [in Tegucigalpa] to get to my site, Santa Cruz.

I live in an adobe house with a dirt floor and a tile roof. I have running water but do not have electricity. My house is one of only about twenty houses in the center of the town. I am lucky to have a large backyard that boasts not only my garden but also four large orange trees, and about two acres of coffee, bananas, platanos, pineapples and many types of tropical fruit trees. I pay the going rate for monthly house rental ($5.00), and, needless to say, it does not stress me out much when it comes time to pay the rent.

When I first showed up in town it was obvious that they were not used to having visitors. Within five minutes over twenty kids of all ages were completely surrounding me and following me everywhere I went. I later found out that they had never seen a person with fair skin and light hair before. Most adults I met were also interested in doing the same thing. . . . Most of the people in Santa Cruz are Lenca Indians, [and are] very short with dark skin. I must be quite a contrast to what they were used to seeing!

I remember vividly my first adventure into the market they have every Sunday in the center of town. As I approached, the crowds of people, everyone there, hundreds of people, turned and stared at me and started whispering to each other. When I approached a woman to try to buy something, she just smiled and turned her head. Most other people that day did the same until a man I had spoken with earlier walked with me around the market; with him beside me I was able to buy anything I wanted.

Well, that was the beginning of my learning the culture and being well-accepted into the small Indian community I was to live and work in for two years. I remember the early incidents most clearly, but many other things have happened since then. One time I was out in front of my house washing dishes and a funeral procession approached carrying the corpse of an old woman on a stretcher. They stopped in front of my house and wanted to talk to me. Well, let me say the body was not in a box or covered up and the sight of it made me nervous. To complicate the situation the people were from a far out *aldea* [village] and spoke with such a heavy accent [that] I could not understand a single word they said. One thing I could tell though, is that they wanted something. After a few minutes of frustration they left and only later did I find out what they were asking. Turned out that the dead woman used to live in my house and they wanted to bring her into the house to visit one last time before she was buried.

Around Easter time once I was invited by a neighbor to eat *tamales* at their house. When I arrived they brought out a great big *tamale* and said, "We made this one special for you." I

thanked them and before I could even start eating it, they broke it open to show me the delicacy inside -- a huge black pig's ear! Since eating the pig's ear seemed to be an honor, I figured there would be no way out of this one so I may as well dig in. Problem is I could not help but eat it slowly because it was chewy and sometimes when I tried to swallow it would come back up again. Halfway through eating this thing the family finally finished (after who knows how long). I found out that half the family had already gone to bed.

Living across from the schoolhouse has had its moments, too. Once when I was in front getting my horse ready, kids from the school came over to watch. "Run fast," they said. What they wanted was for me to ride fast, or generally do things on my horse to entertain them (like I sometimes do). When I mounted my horse *Canario* I nudged him with the spurs to go but he would not budge. Thinking he was being stubborn I gave him some kicks and started yelling at him. "C'mon you stupid horse," I said. About now all the kids started laughing, [as if] this was the funniest thing they had seen in a long time -- my horse was still tied to the post.

Attending church in my town has been the key to my adjusting. Every other night there is a three-hour service held in someone's house. I do not attend all of them but when I do it's quite an experience. Usually people walk a great distance to attend and they arrive in groups with each person holding either a flashlight or a flaming piece of wood. From a distance, if you are behind such a group, you can see a trail of lights going up the mountain. Then people bring out their guitars and everybody sings, etc. Afterward, people sit around and drink coffee and talk. The town's social structure is [centered] around these services and besides being a worship service it is here where people exchange news and information.

I spent last Christmas Eve in such a service and people were curiously asking me questions. "Are you an orphan?" they asked. "Are you going to ride your horse to visit your family sometime?" Even after assuring them that I cared about my family and that nothing was wrong, I think they still did not quite understand what I was doing all alone away from my family -- without even a brother or sister in Honduras! They would never be away from their families on such an important occasion. Questions like that often got me thinking. Living here in Honduras is sometimes stressful because of the cultural differences, but one thing is for sure: never in my entire life have I experienced so much personal growth in such a short amount of time.

Last week I started the long walk out of Santa Cruz with more gear than I usually carry with me. I was on my way, this year, to visit my family in the United States for Christmas. As I walked along the trail, people who were working in the field waved, yelled out my name and said "Merry Christmas!" When I finally got to the end of the trail where I could sit down and rest, the thought occurred to me that instead of feeling like I was going to visit my family, I felt like I was leaving it.

John Ferguson
Santa Cruz, Lempira

CATACAMAS MARKET

The market keeps transforming itself
    one minute to the next
as I gaze about.
First, a dirty noisy, smelly place,
everyone in rags and poor, flies everywhere
mothers scolding their screaming children,
and me guarding my pack like a hawk against thieves;
    people selling worthless junk imported from
the States, and the poor wasting their last
    centavos to buy it;
And the busses squashed full with sweaty bodies
pushing and yelling and the whole scene is
    Very dreary and trodden looking.

Then, it becomes a social place, people
    buying and selling, and kids playing with the dogs,
sharing their ice cream, and bananas piled high, five
centavos a piece (a bargain) and it's active here,
but relaxed; people watching busses, talking about
their neighbor's jealous husband;
    And it's a colorful place, oranges hanging in bags
trinkets of all kinds glimmering for the children's eyes,
and people going places, their bags packed,
and others waiting, watching each other and
watching the afternoon going by at the market and
just being themselves.

Rebecca Easton
Iban, Gracias a Dios

"Dear Future Volunteer" is from the Honduras invitation book prepared by the Peace Corps of the United States. "Catacamas Market" is from *Alli No Mas*, the Volunteer newsletter of Peace Corps/Honduras.

A HONDURAS: THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

"*A Honduras*" ("To Honduras") is a song that expresses the great respect and love that Hondurans feel for their fatherland.

In the years following its independence, Honduras lacked a national anthem. In its place, "*La Granadera*," a beautiful march commemorating the battles, victories, and sacrifices of General Morazán, was played at civic events and official ceremonies. At school festivals people sang hymns by Honduran poets, although none in particular became popular.

In 1904, the President of the Republic, General Manuel Bonilla, gave several writers the task of writing hymns from which an anthem would be chosen. The poem of Augusto C. Coello, entitled A Honduras (To Honduras) was selected, and given to the director of the martial band, don Carlos Hartling, to be set to music.

In 1915, "*A Honduras*" (sometimes called "*Tu Bandera*" -- "Your Flag") was formally declared by the Honduran government as the country's official anthem.

As your standard, as your standard
serves a strip of cloudless azure,
Which in twain is cut,
Which in twain is cut by a band that
snows besprinkle;
In whose sacred abysses there twinkle
Five pale stars lit with softest rays of
blue.
And in your shield, that a strident sea is
guarding
With the bulwark of its savage billows'
might,
A volcano stands, a volcano stands,
From whose lonely summit's height
Comes the beacon clear,
Comes the beacon clear,
Of a star that flashes there.

Tu bandera, tu bandera es un lampo de
cielo por un bloque,
por un bloque de nieve cruzado;
y se venen su fondo sagrado
cinco estrellas de palido azul;
en tu emblema que un mar rumoroso
con sus ondas bravias escuda,
De un volcan, de un volcan tras la
cima desnuda hay un astro,
hay un astro de nitida luz.

In defence of our glorious emblem
We are ready, my Country, to perish,
For future ages their fame will ever
cherish
Who in their dying hour are thinking of
your love.
In the defence of your holy banner
fallen,
Their lifeless forms in its hallowed folds
enshrouded.
Not few, blessed Honduras, shall be your
proud dead,
But they all in honour's cause will die.

Por guardar ese emblema divino,
marcharemos Oh Patria a la muerte,
Generosa sera nuestra suerte,
Si morimos pensando en tu amor.
Defendiendo tu santa bandera
y en tus pliegues gloriosos cubiertos,
seran muchos, Oh Honduras tus
muertos,
pero todos caeran con honor.

Introduction from *Nuestro Pais: Estudios Sociales*, M. Navarro, Tegucigalpa, Honduras: Publicaciones Navarro, 1992. Translated by Rebecca Lemberg. Anthem from *National Anthems of the World*, Sixth Edition, W.L. Reed and M.J. Bristow, editors, London: Cassell PLC, 1985. Used with permission.

A CLOSER LOOK AT COLUMBUS

The following reading is from the Honduran social studies textbook *Nuestro Pais: Estudios Sociales* (Miguel Navarro, Honduras: Publicaciones Navarro, 1992). As you read this account, think about the way it compares with the versions of Columbus's explorations that you read as a child. Are there are any surprises?

Christopher Columbus was the first navigator to succeed in crossing the Atlantic Ocean; his journey resulted in the discovery of the New World.

We have little information about his youth because he tried to hide his humble origins. Columbus began to sail when he was very young. The book *The Travels of Marco Polo* gave him the desire to see distant countries. He travelled throughout the Mediterranean and the north Atlantic, and along the western coasts of Africa becoming an experienced sailor and an expert navigator. He was tall, red haired, and blue-eyed.

His travels and studies led him to conclude that the world was round. His correspondence with the famous astronomer and geographer Pablo Toscanelli affirmed this idea and led him to believe that the trip from Portugal to India would be shorter if one sailed west. At this time, many educated people also believed that the earth was round.

Columbus was about thirty years old when he conceived of his plan to cross the Atlantic in search of India and the Spice Islands. Columbus and his fellow Genoans basically believed that, since the earth was round, one would inevitably reach India if one travelled west.

Columbus Seeks Support

Because he did not have the resources to make the trip, Columbus sought backing in Genoa, Venice, Portugal, England, and France. Accompanied by his son Diego, he eventually travelled to Spain to seek the aid of the Catholic monarchs, Don Fernando and Doña Isabel.

After much deliberation, Ferdinand and Isabella signed the *Convenio de Santa Fe* which made them financially responsible for the voyage, and which made Columbus admiral and viceroy of any land or sea that he discovered. In addition, Columbus was given the rights to one-tenth of all riches obtained in the discoveries.

Queen Isabella had to borrow money to finance the grand venture.

First Voyage

Columbus quickly hurried to the port of Palos (Spain), the city chosen for organizing the expedition.

At first he had trouble finding sailors to accompany him on the dangerous voyage. However, thanks to the Pinzón brothers, who were expert and daring navigators, Columbus acquired three caravels.

The largest caravel, which carried the Admiral and the Royal Pavillion of Castile, was the Santa María, the captain ship. The Niña and the Pinta were captained by Vicente Yáñez Pinzón and Martin Alonso Pinzón, respectively. The three ships carried about one hundred sailors and passengers.

On the morning of August 3, 1492, the small caravels sailed from the port of Palos for the Canary Islands, in the most memorable voyage of history. The expedition, which

was delayed for a month in the Canary Islands so that preparations could be completed, set out in the beginning of September.

Because they did not see land for the whole month of September, the men began to worry. The immensity of the sea made them fear that they would never be able to return to Spain. Sometimes with threats and other times with promises, Columbus convinced them to continue their voyage west.

New World

One day when the crew was on the point of a rebellion, they spotted a flock of birds which usually fly close to land. Then they saw green branches floating in the sea -- a sure sign that they were close to land.

Finally, early in the morning of October 12, 1492, a member of the Pinta's crew, shouted, "Land! Land!" A cannon was fired to alert the other ships.

On awakening, Columbus and his companions gazed with astonishment and delight at a coast covered with tropical vegetation. A group of naked brown-haired men stood on the beach and observed the recent arrivals with shock. Columbus believed that he had arrived on the coast of Asia, but he had really discovered the New World.

Columbus later dressed in his admiral's uniform and disembarked. Raising the flag of Castile, he solemnly took possession of the land in the name of the rulers of Spain. Columbus believed that he had arrived in India.

The explorers had arrived at an island known to the local people as *Guanahaní*. Columbus named this small island San Salvador. He later explored the neighboring waters, discovering the islands of Cuba and Haití. Because of the negligence of one of the helmsman, the Santa María ran aground on the coast of Haití, or Española as Columbus called it.

After three months in the Antilles, the expedition began the long voyage home carrying rare plants, birds with beautiful feathers, pearls, and some natives. The voyage was difficult: the ships were almost wrecked when they were hit by a terrible storm.

On March 15, 1493, Columbus and his company arrived in Palos, where they were received with great honor. Everyone in Spain believed that Columbus had discovered "the new route to India."

Discovery of Honduras

Columbus made three additional trips to the New World. His fourth and last trip was the most important for us, because that was when he discovered Honduras.

Columbus's main worry was reaching India, which meant finding the strait that connected the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Columbus set out from Cádiz in search of this strait in early May of 1502. For some reason, the Spanish rulers ordered him not to visit Española (Hispaniola).

This expedition was made up of four small ships with 140 crew members. The admiral was accompanied by his son Fernando and his brother Bartholomew.

In spite of the monarch's prohibition, Columbus arrived at Española and tried to land; however, the new governor of the island, Nicolás de Ovando, stopped him.

While Columbus was on the Española coast, a storm broke out. He sought shelter in an inlet, and, when the storm passed, continued to sail south.

On July 30, 1502, he arrived at the Island of Guanaja, the first Central American territory visited by the Spaniards. Columbus named it *Isla de los Pinos* (Isle of the Pines), because of the trees that covered it.

While Columbus's brother, Bartholomew, was exploring the island he spotted a large canoe filled with Indians. These men, the first merchants of Honduras, sold their goods throughout the Caribbean.

The Spaniards curiously examined the merchants' goods: copper axes, flint-edged swords, bright-colored cotton, jewelry, cocoa, and other natural products. In his journal Columbus noted: "These Indians are more civilized than those of the Antilles: they haven't been surprised at the sight of our ships, nor have they been afraid to approach us. They are also better dressed than the Indians of the other islands. The articles they are selling are of better quality, too."

The explorers set sail for the mountainous coast that they could see to the south. On August 14th they arrived at the Point of Castile, anchoring in the bay where the port of Trujillo is today. Once ashore, the crew members celebrated the first Mass of the New World. The admiral did not join them, however, because he was tired and ill.

The first name that the Spaniards gave to the territory of Honduras was *Guaimura* -- the name of an Indian community which lived near the Bay of Trujillo.

After much hardship, the Discoverer of the New World finally returned to Spain. Sadly, his protectress, the Queen of Spain, died shortly thereafter.

Columbus spent the last years of his life in ill health and anonymity. He died in the city of Valladolid, Spain, on May 20, 1506, unknown and embittered by the injustices he had suffered. His remains rest in the cathedral of Santo Domingo. His epitaph reads: "Columbus gave the New World to Castile and León."

Naming America

Columbus did not have the honor of having the continent he discovered named after him. The New World should have been named Colombia, or *Tierra de Colón* (Land of Columbus).

The American continent was named neither by its discoverer, nor by the rulers of Spain. Instead, it was named by the modest German geographer, Martin Waldseemüller in whose work *Introduction to Cosmography* we find these words: "The fourth part of the world was discovered by Americo Vespucci. I don't see why his right to have this land named America has been impeded."

Americo Vespucci, Florentine navigator and geographer, accompanied various Spanish explorers on their voyages to the New World. He later published a book on his travels. Martin Waldseemüller, who translated Vespucci's book into German, believed that Vespucci was the true discoverer of the New World.

For many years the Spaniards referred to their colonies as the West Indies, or simply, the Indies. Finally they gave them the beautiful name of America.

Adapted from *Nuestro Pais: Estudios Sociales*, M. Navarro, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 1992. Translated by Rebecca Lemberg. Used with permission.

WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT LAND USE?

Vince Murphy,
Former Peace Corps Volunteer, Honduras

According to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, the word "sustain" means "to keep up, to prolong, to maintain." When something is <u>not</u> sustainable, it cannot be kept up over long periods of time. "Unsustainable land use" refers to ways in which people use land that, when practiced over large areas or over long periods of time, cause severe damage to the environment. What are some of these practices? Migratory agriculture (sometimes called "slash-and-burn" agriculture), unmanaged logging and firewood collection, and the uncontrolled clearing of land for grazing, are all land uses that can easily become "earth unfriendly." One of the most obvious effects of these practices is deforestation. One of the least obvious, yet most devastating, is the generation of a cycle of poverty and poor land use.

The Causes

The cycle of unsustainable land use has its roots in three basic institutions: tradition, the land tenure (ownership) system, and poverty. These three institutions work together to trap poor rural farmers in a destructive cycle of inappropriate land use that perpetuates a low standard of living and rapidly cuts away at a country's natural resource base, the basis for a developing country's economy. To break the cycle, one must bring about a change in these institutions.

The traditional system of land use in many developing countries is migratory agriculture, or slash-and-burn agriculture. Typically, a farmer, having exhausted the fertility of his plot of land, clears another area. Because tropical soils are typically poor, he burns the cleared area to get rid of the brush and to give the soil a quick fix of nutrient-rich ash. Thus enriched, the soil is fertile for a few years. But crops soon use up nutrients and the forces of erosion work against the exposed land. The topsoil washes away, leaving the land infertile. When his harvest begins to diminish, the farmer abandons that plot and clears and burns another.

At first glance, slash-and-burn seems to be a very wasteful and destructive system. It should be noted, however, that migratory agriculture is not an intrinsically bad system. It worked for centuries when populations were small and scattered. When there are relatively few people living off the land, it efficiently uses the abundant resource (land), and conserves the more scarce resource (labor). The large and widespread populations in nearly all of the developing world are what make this system so wasteful and destructive today. But for lack of knowledge of a better way, the migratory agriculture system continues to be passed on to succeeding generations.

Tradition, or perhaps lack of tradition, is involved in another way. Over years of exploitation and modernization, many people have lost touch with the indigenous culture from which they came. These cultures lived closely with the land, respected it, and understood that it was something to be protected. Many of the people of Honduras have lost this cultural identity with the land. Some people see the land primarily as something to exploit.

The land ownership system in Honduras is another institution that is at the root of improper land use. Most of the country's best land is owned by the very wealthy. If you ever travel through Honduras, notice the flat and fertile land that is most suitable for growing food. You will see that this land is being used to grow export crops (e.g., bananas and coffee), or even more likely, to graze cattle. Because flat land is unavailable, *campesinos* (small farmers) are forced to plant their corn and beans on steep slopes that would be better as protected watersheds that supply clean water to lowland populations.

Another land tenure problem arises from the fact that many *campesinos* don't own the land they work. This is a problem faced by Peace Corps Volunteers who promote soil conservation methods as one way to check the destruction of soil erosion. Soil conservation methods -- digging ditches or building terraces along the contour of the slope to prevent erosion -- require an initial investment of time and energy, and the luxury of being able to wait to see the benefits of your efforts. Too, a struggling farmer is not likely to put forth great effort to improve land that is not his.

The third institution that contributes to the cycle is poverty and the struggle to meet basic needs. Poverty creates an urgency to meet basic needs that can inhibit the desire to invest time and energy on better and less destructive methods of agriculture. Unfortunately, as in any vicious cycle, poverty and destructive land use feed upon each other. The destruction of Honduras's natural resources will continue until something is introduced to break this cycle.

The Effects

Tradition, the land ownership system, and poverty all contribute to the cycle of unsustainable land use. Unsustainable land use includes practices such as migratory agriculture, unmanaged logging and firewood cutting, and the random clearing of land for grazing -- practices that cause of one of the world's most pressing problems: deforestation.

We are all familiar with deforestation. It is nearly impossible not to see it. Deforestation affects people and the environment in many ways, some obvious and some not so obvious. One such effect is watershed degradation.

What is watershed degradation? A watershed is the area over which rain falls and is channeled down to a particular place. The watershed of Lake Yojoa, for example, is all of the land which surrounds the lake and upon which rain falls. The watershed of a community is all the land over which rain falls and fog condenses and then drains into a collecting basin; pipes carry water from this basin or reservoir into the city or town. Watersheds vary in size from a small area above a spring, to a river valley, to an entire mountain range as in the case of Tegucigalpa (Tay-goo-see-GAL-pah). In Honduras, a healthy watershed would be covered with trees and vegetation and contain only controlled populations of people or livestock.

A forested watershed works very much like a good filter: rainfall first strikes high up in the canopy of the trees. The raindrops bounce from leaf to leaf, their power to erode diminishing with each bounce. They then fall softly onto the forest floor which is covered with dead leaves that also absorb their force. The forest shades the soil, so that the sun does not dry it out. The rainwater then seeps into

the soil which has become porous due to the action of decomposing insects and the root network of plants. Water filters slowly through the soil until it eventually reaches surface waterways, such as streams or lakes. Water naturally moves slowly through this system, continuously replenishing streams and preventing extreme cycles of flood and drought. The forest cover protects the soil from erosion, so the water that flows is clean.

If the watershed has been deforested, there is less vegetation to shade the soil and to reduce the erosive force of the rain. Water runs swiftly off the mountains taking precious topsoil with it. The water supply dries up in summer because there is no longer the natural mechanism of storage and slow release. Drinking water is clouded with silt, and contaminated with parasites from the waste of humans and livestock that live or work in the watershed. Runoff is immediate because the watershed has lost the ability to store water. Rivers are thick with mud, and flooding occurs frequently and fiercely.

In the Bay Islands off the Caribbean coast, soil from deforested hillsides is washed into the sea where it slowly chokes the beautiful coral reefs that bring the country international acclaim. Siltation poses a similar problem for the hydroelectric power industry, which provides electricity to nearly all of Honduras as well as to many other Central American countries. (Erosion has silted the country's reservoirs to such an extent that their water-holding capacity has been reduced. Sediment can also damage turbine blades and other equipment.) Extensive deforestation has also had an effect on the country's climate. Lack of shade causes temperatures to rise and the dry season to become longer. The Choluteca and Valle regions on the south coast, for example, have become hotter, drier, and less productive as a result of deforestation. A side effect of this is that the *campesinos*, who are now unable to live off the land, are fleeing the south. "Ecological refugees," they are moving into other areas -- and increasing pressure on Honduras's remaining natural resources.

Erosion resulting from deforestation also reduces soil fertility and thus the yield a farmer can get from the land. Although it can take hundreds of years to create topsoil (the fertile upper layer of soil rich in organic nutrients), it can be washed away in just a few years. Soil infertility forces farmers to search elsewhere for a plot to work. There will soon come a time when there will be no other land to work.

Deforestation also affects the people of Honduras in other, less obvious, ways. The loss of scenic beauty and loss of wildlife are obvious enough, but the resulting loss in potential tourism is harder to quantify. If you look at Costa Rica, a country that has set aside large areas of land as national parks and earns millions of dollars a year in ecotourism, you can see that the potential cost of environmental destruction is significant. Lost also is the natural heritage of the country, and the chance for its people to identity with it.

Diminished and unclean water supplies, and the loss of fertile soil, hydroelectric potential, and tourism, all combine to decrease the productivity of the land. From reduced productivity comes low income, high unemployment, and poor health and nutrition. These are all symptoms of poverty that take us back to the beginning of the cycle, only to follow the same worn path again. To make matters worse, the high population growth rate of Honduras (one of the highest in

the hemisphere) outstrips any gains a struggling economy can make. If things are bad now, what will happen when the population doubles?

There are also "foreign" factors in the land-use cycle. The insatiable appetite of developed countries for export commodities such as coffee, bananas, and tropical woods, perpetuates the land ownership system that excludes most *campesinos*. The governments of many developing countries subsidize the mass cutting of tropical timber for export to help chip away at a foreign debt. (These are serious problems, but like the land ownership system, they are probably beyond the scope of a Peace Corps Volunteer's service.)

Why do we work to protect wildland areas? Aside from their beauty and mystery, and their right to exist independent of their human utility, we work to protect wildland areas for the gifts they give us. Because it influences everything from health to business, to climate, to national pride, water -- our most precious resource -- is by far the most important gift. Protecting it and the environment from which it comes is more than an irrelevant North American aesthetic ideal -- it is a basic means to survival for those living in the developing world.

CLARIFYING WHAT YOU HAVE READ

1. Give the meaning of each term, then explain its relationship to the problem of deforestation in Honduras:
   a. unsustainable land use
   b. land tenure system
   c. ecological refugee
   d. watershed degradation
   e. erosion

2. According to the author, which of the following are unsustainable when used over long periods of time and over wide areas?
   __ erosion __ logging __ migratory agriculture
   __ siltation __ ecotourism __ grazing __ firewood collecting

3. Are there any circumstances under which the practices you checked (above) might be sustainable? Explain.

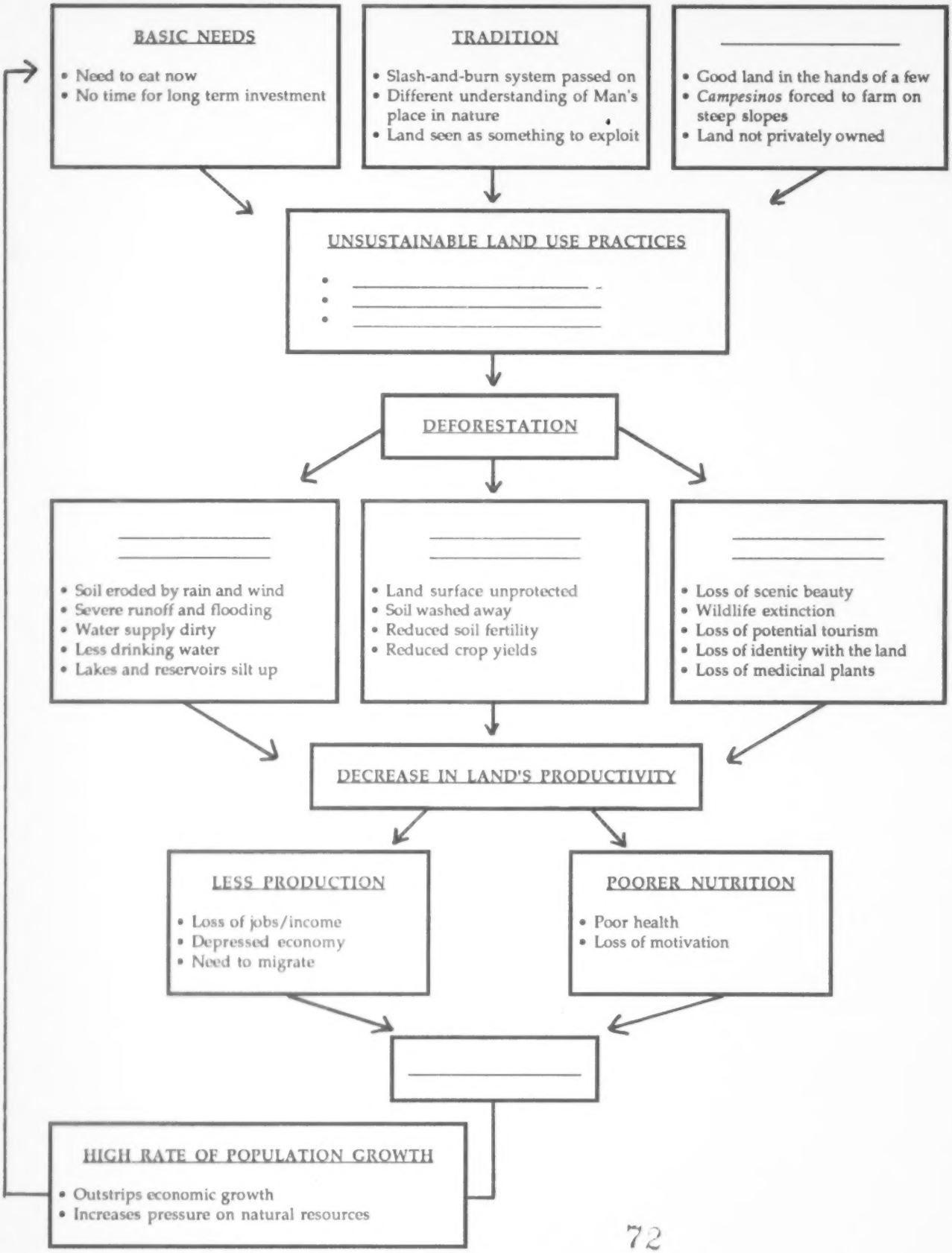
4. Briefly describe the Murphy's cycle of unsustainable land use. In your opinion, what can be done to break the cycle? In your opinion, does this same cycle exist in the United States? Why or why not?

5. Which messages or ideas in this article apply to the United States? To your Peace Corps Volunteer's host country?

6. With which part of this article do you most strongly agree? Most strongly disagree? Why?

Adapted from "Land Conversion Syndrome: A Downward Spiral," by Vince Murphy, in *Allí No Mas*, the Volunteer newsletter of Peace Corps/Honduras, 1991.

_____: A DOWNWARD SPIRAL


BASIC NEEDS
• Need to eat now
• No time for long term investment
TRADITION
• Slash-and-burn system passed on
• Different understanding of Man's place in nature
• Land seen as something to exploit
_____
• Good land in the hands of a few
• *Campesinos* forced to farm on steep slopes
• Land not privately owned
UNSUSTAINABLE LAND USE PRACTICES
•
•
•
DEFORESTATION
_____
• Soil eroded by rain and wind
• Severe runoff and flooding
• Water supply dirty
• Less drinking water
• Lakes and reservoirs silt up
_____
• Land surface unprotected
• Soil washed away
• Reduced soil fertility
• Reduced crop yields
_____
• Loss of scenic beauty
• Wildlife extinction
• Loss of potential tourism
• Loss of identity with the land
• Loss of medicinal plants
DECREASE IN LAND'S PRODUCTIVITY
LESS PRODUCTION
• Loss of jobs/income
• Depressed economy
• Need to migrate
POORER NUTRITION
• Poor health
• Loss of motivation
_____
HIGH RATE OF POPULATION GROWTH
• Outstrips economic growth
• Increases pressure on natural resources

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ORGANIZATIONS WHICH PROVIDED INFORMATION

Embassy of Honduras
3007 Tilden Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008

Friends of Honduras
7033 S.E. Mitchell Street
Portland, Oregon 97206

Geography Education Program
National Geographic Society
17th and M Streets, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

National Council for Geographic Education
6A Leonard Hall
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705

National Wildlife Federation
8925 Leesburg Pike
Vienna, Virginia 22184

Network of Educators on Central America
(NECA)
1118 22nd Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20526

The World Conservation Union (IUCN)
CH 1196
Gland, Switzerland

World Wildlife Fund
1250 24th Street, N.W. Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20037

INDIVIDUALS WHO PROVIDED INFORMATION

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* * * *

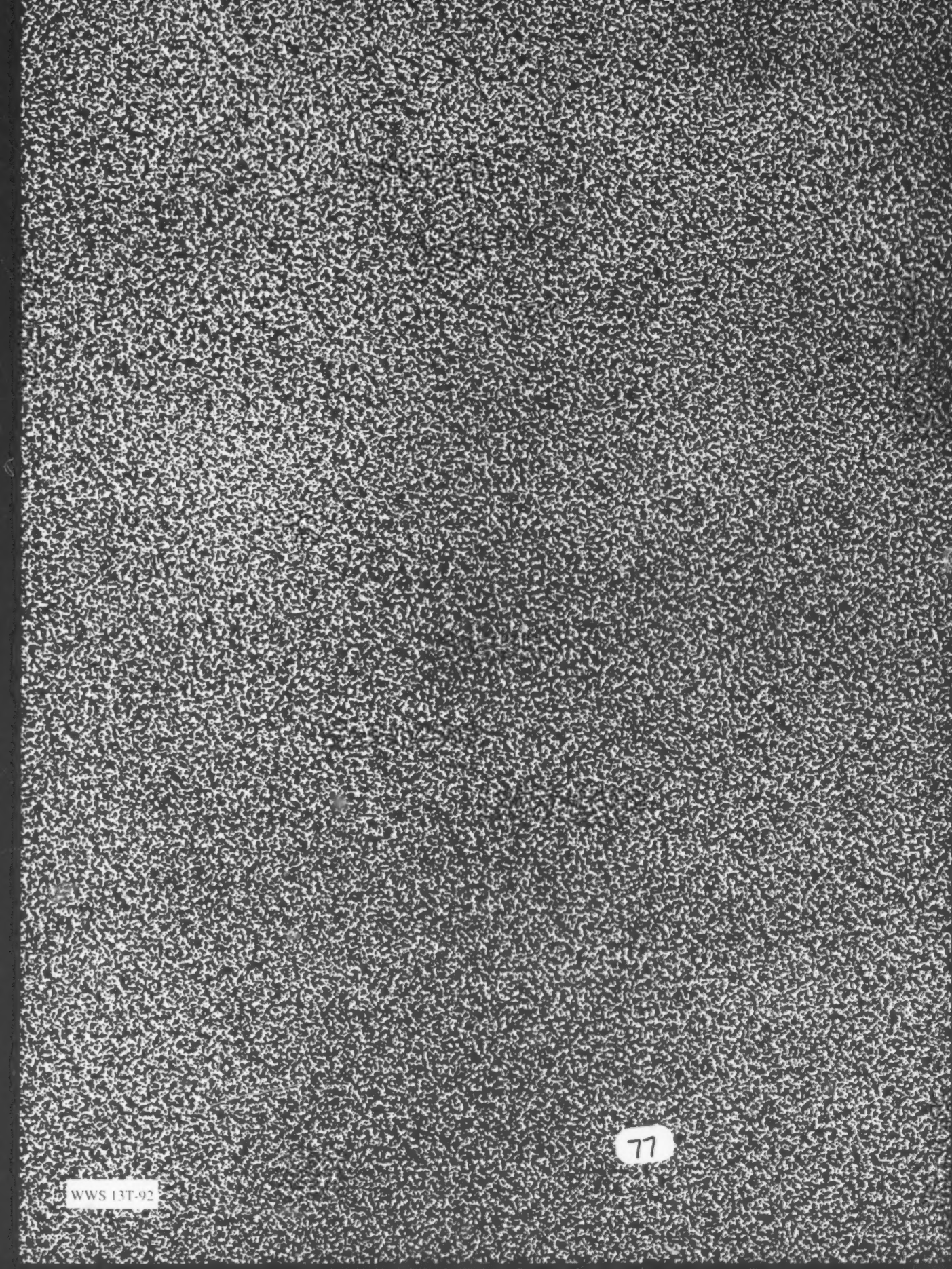
CORRECTIONS

- *Destination: Sri Lanka*, page 21. The last stanza of "Flying" should read:

  Soon the tea from
  this factory
  will go to Africa,
  England, America,
  tea from my island,
  from my hills.

- *Destination: Sri Lanka*, page 27. The last line of verse one of the first elephant poem should read: *Tinkle, tinkle, tink, goes he.*

Our sincere apologies to the poet, Mrs. Alfreda De Silva, for these errors which appeared in *Destination: Sri Lanka*.



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